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Tussock Land

A ROMANCE OF NEW ZEALAND AND THE COMMONWEALTH

BY

ARTHUR H. ADAMS

Author of
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TUSSOCK LAND

I

NINETEEN, aglow with health, with a heart untroubled, from sheer gladness of living Aroha Grey sang.

Overhead was the fathomless blue of the New Zealand sky. Across this arch of turquoise scurried thin wisps of white clouds, as if the keen, persistent wind that swept down the valley had blown the waves of the sky into foam. It was a crisp, splendid autumn day in the south of New Zealand. Already there was a taste of winter in the air, and the breeze that forever roamed these solitudes of tussock land brought with it this afternoon some memory of the Antarctic that had given it birth.

The long valley sloped slowly up to the narrow saddle, or ridge, that divided two watersheds. Towards that saddle Aroha Grey was trudging. On each side of her ran a range of hills, and, as she gradually climbed the valley, in the gaps in their skylines she caught glimpses of range after range of similar hills, until the horizon curtained in the world. She stood in the centre of a wide sea of treeless land, valley and plain and hill, streaked by winding streams and noisy creeks and made green by swamp. Little patches of scrub hung in the steep gullies of the hills; the sturdy brown standards of the flax and

the faint white feather of the toë drooped over the streams in the valleys, and raupo edged the swamps with a ring of brown spears and green. Here and there a ploughed paddock loomed blue and naked on the river flats, or a sown paddock shone vividly green against the golden grey of the tussocks. But these were but little scars upon the surface of the land; everywhere else the silky tussocks held sway, clothing spur and valley with a faint tinge of gold.

Just before the girl reached the top of the saddle she paused. Ever since she could remember she had halted here for a few moments before making her way to the summit. Before her the slope ran gently up to the horizon; over the edge lay—what? The line of wind-swept tussocks against the sky had in it some faint suggestion of mystery, a vague hint of the unknown. As a child she had always shrunk from going quite to the edge of visible things: before the uncertainty of the unknown she had ever stood silent, wistful, hesitant, wondering. So now, as ever, she halted beneath the edge of the ridge, a little sheltered from the steady stream of wind that poured over it, and let her fancies rove.

Yet it furnished an index to her character that never once, however deep the twilight, however haunting the fear of the invisible—and to an imaginative child how real, how vivid that terror is!—she had never turned back without climbing swiftly that diminishing space of homely security and giving one terrified glance into the uncertainty beyond. Only to find it eternally the same, a yellow sweep of valley running down into a nest of level land lost among a monotony of broad-shouldered hills, and against the horizon a jagged line of glistening snow-clad peaks. On days when the rain had washed the atmosphere to a crystalline lucidity the sharp naked

outline of that range of mountains, rising majestically, fifty miles away, from an adoring multitude of hills, seemed so near to Aroha that she had only to stretch out her hand and feel the cool smoothness of each dazzling peak.

This afternoon as she halted she turned back and glanced at the way she had come. Her song broke suddenly off with a little laugh at her childish fears. Far in the valley beneath her crouched the homestead, a little group of scattered, unpainted wooden buildings—woolshed, huts, stables, men's quarters and house. The little grey buildings looked pitiably small in the midst of this welter of hills. A few ploughed paddocks surrounded the homestead; some straggling trees betokened what was still optimistically termed the orchard; a cart track wound across the paddocks from the woolshed, disappearing far down the valley behind a spur; barbed wire fences faintly pencilled stiff lines across the level ground and ran straightly up the shoulders of the hills.

Along the valley writhed a little creek, like a serpent, glinting in and out of the ragged patches of green that clung about its path. And in the west stood the splendid sun, yellowing all the spurs, touching with golden fingers the distant hill-tops. And Aroha wondered, as she had often wondered before, why, with this valley leading so entrancingly into the clear west, the builder of the house had turned his back on the only vista in this sea of crowded hills, and set his house grimly facing the bleak hillside. Perhaps the incessant winds that had the valley for their path could tell.

In that little valley the endless hills had shut in Aroha and her nineteen years of life. She had been born in that unpainted house, had played the great dramas of her childhood beneath its shade, had

learnt to love and know each climbing spur, each entrancing gully, had followed the little creek up to the spring that gave it life, and down through all its wilful windings until a wire fence bridged it from bank to bank, and her father's property went no further. Yet she followed it further in her fancy, saw it wandering slowly among the creases of the hills, finding its blindfold way to the river of which it had vaguely and incessantly dreamed, moving undeviatingly towards the unseen sea. The girl was sometimes a little envious of the creek; it could go so far, see so much, reach such undreamed-of goals. And she was shut in by those walls of hills—dead, lonely hills, untenanted save by the far-scattered, slow-browsing mobs of sheep, that looked in the distance like some strange efflorescence of grey flowers upon the tawny hillsides. So she was shut in between the earth and the low, windy sky.

She made chums of the rabbiters' dogs, the quiet old horses that pulled the plough. To her the old shepherd who rode in for stores once a week from his whare at the top of the run was a traveller from the ends of the earth. And out of the sheer loneliness of a solitary childhood—for to a child there is always something hopelessly incomprehensible in the outlook of her parents—she made friends with John, the young station ploughman, who used to save his wages to buy tickets for Tattersall's racing sweeps in Australia, and who played at even-tide mightily upon the accordion. He was the only one in the station who was near her child's mind; he was eighteen, and had not quite forgotten how to dream.

So she had grown alone, save for the people on the run and her parents. Then had come the glorious yet terrible day when she left the run for a short stay with her aunt in Dunedin. She was

to see the Outside for the first time, at last to peer over the edge! And oh! how comfortable, how safe, had appeared the homestead that awful day! She felt as she rose that morning—she had lain awake, wondering, all night—that if ever she got back to the run she would never more stir from it. The hills were her own; they would never mock her.

Her eyes were wet as she climbed into the dray that was to take her and her small carpet-bag to the nearest railway station, ten miles away. To her mother, standing, outwardly calm, at the back porch, Aroha waved a frenzied farewell. Then she had to hold on tightly, as to a chorus of barking collies and a guttural "Hed-oop!" from John who was the driver, the dray creaked and jangled through the ford of the creek and climbed the other side. Aroha strained her eyes upon the diminishing group of the homestead, till at last a bluff, round which the road ran, shut it from sight. Then the tears came.

It was a long silent ride in that springless dray to the wayside flag-station. John was never a conversational youth; only on the accordion was he eloquent. And that day he seemed to the girl more taciturn than ever. To her half-terrified entreaties to be taken back he had no answer. On the station platform, as they waited for the train, he handed her ten shillings; he wanted her to get him something for a present-like for a young lady of his acquaintance. And Aroha felt a sudden jealousy of the woman unknown for whom she was to choose this gift. She had always considered John as her exclusive property.

Then the train had bustled in, and she had found herself thrust into a second-class carriage and in an agony of fear she had thrown her arms round John's

neck and kissed him. It was a kiss of fear, a clinging to the last familiar thing of her life ere she was flung out into the unknown. It was only long after the train had started that Aroha woke with a blush to the remembrance of the smile on the faces of the watching passengers at that impetuous good-bye.

It was a wonderful fortnight that the gods gave Aroha in Dunedin. To the girl the beautiful little southern city, set at the head of its long, narrow, winding water-way, lying between the placid water of its harbour and the long rollers of the Pacific, ringed about by its broad swathe of purple bush and crowned with rugged hills, was the World, the Unknown—Sydney, London, Paris, Rome!

But it was better to be home again, among the things that were hers. And since that brief visit to the city a year ago she had dwelt content within the circle of the hills. And when she had given John the lace collar she had bought for his envied love, he had handed it back to her, and gone suddenly out and chastised his dogs.

II

At last, with a little sigh that had no sorrow in it, Aroha turned again to the slope. Just a little way off it was—that line of rustling tussocks against the sky.

This was her chosen playground as a child, her palace of fancies as a maid. Here she used to throw herself full-length among the tussocks and gaze for hours at the ever-scurrying clouds. She wove vague and entrancing romances for herself out of this wide expanse of hill and sky. The little clouds were the boats of the fleet carrying her dreams over the world, voyaging wide across new skies, encompassing unknown horizons. Or the tussocks became the restless, rustling waves of a yellow-grey ocean, over whose vast surges she and her fairy prince would sail and sail away, out of the prison of the hills, out anywhere so long as it was with him!

For there was always a fairy prince woven into the texture of her dreams. He was vague, heroic, wonderful. But above all he was strong. Some wondrous day he would appear, and snatch her quickly to his heart. She would resist his kisses—just a little, that he might hold her the closer—and his lips would storm her reluctance with their great eagerness. So she would lie in his arms in a very faintness of joy. And all the world would be theirs to do with as they would. He must be strong; it was strength that her heart cried so passionately for. She was strong too; but she was a woman. It was

a fine thing to be able to shape her life as she willed it, to master her fate, to decide, to rule. But for a woman there was a greater and a more gracious thing—to surrender all the strength that was in her in loving service to a personality richer, more puissant. She stood alone—she had stood alone all her young life—but her womanhood cried out at the unaccustomed burden.

So she waited for the fairy prince—the splendid, confident, irresistible fairy prince that would snatch her up from this niggard little life and reeve her, delirious with a divine helplessness, away—away.

And he would come—some day he would come. Of that her heart was assured. She could wait his coming with a woman's patience.

At first the fairy prince took the appearance of John, the ploughman. He was yet little more than a boy, but he ploughed the straightest furrow in the district and had won medals at the annual ploughing contests at Mataura. His hut was close to the homestead—a one-roomed shanty containing a stretcher bed with a mattress of sacking and a kerosene box that did duty as a chair, its walls and ceiling papered with illustrations from the Sydney *Bulletin*. On a shelf over the bunk stood his accordion, his only treasure, and an assortment of evil-smelling pipes. The back of the door was covered by a constantly augmenting collection of tickets that had failed to draw a prize at Tattersall's frequently recurring racing sweeps.

But after a short reign as fairy prince John had failed to retain the throne. He was certainly strong; and in the days when he was prince it was Aroha's deep delight to lie out in the fields and watch John at the plough. Up and down the big paddock, in lines that never wavered from straight-

ness, the team would go, and behind his triple shares the three steaming furrows would flow in black, even lines. So she would lie for hours, listening in a delicious reverie to the faint musical clank and creak of the harness, broken now and again by his half-intoned "Hed-oop!" and "Who-aa, the little mare!" and idly watching the sea-gulls busy over the freshly-turned earth. She wondered, as she watched the trail of gulls, that had flown a hundred miles inland to follow the plough, as they quarrelled with peevish cries, familiar about the furrows, whether she would ever repay their visits, cross the ocean that was their world. . . .

But when the fairy prince put aside the solitude of the fields, when the mere kinship of life thrust these two together, he failed dismally to fill the *rôle*. John stood in such reverential awe of her—and all she wanted was to be loved! He was heavy of face, slow of speech. His lips were sullen, not stern. When she sometimes slipped out to his whare after tea, she entered into no new realm of enchantment. She looked for the lover triumphant, and found only the ploughman abashed. Once she suddenly kissed him: it seemed to John a profanation of her lips. So, reluctantly—for she was very lonely—she deposed him from his proud place; and though the poor fellow struggled dimly to comprehend the reasons of his dismissal, and continued to understudy the splendid part she had once allotted to him, her imagination made the dismissal final. In such important things as a girl's dreams, a mere side issue like John does not count.

But it was not long before the vacant throne was filled. This new claimant to the realm was a state school-teacher from Pukerau, where, day after day, he gathered into the little schoolhouse by the main road

a dozen children from the neighbouring township and taught them English with a strong Scotch accent. Aroha had met him at a dance given in the Hathaways' new woolshed. He had worn an absurd suit of black with quaint little tails and a very niggard allowance of waistcoat; but his dancing was to the girl like the revelation of a new sense. He was a tall, sallow youth, with large hands, wide ears and a bulging forehead. In after life he became a cabinet minister.

After supper he had said some things to Aroha in an intonation that made her imagine that he was repeating a school lesson; but the words were beautiful. It was like a song that was too perfect to be sung. She had asked him what it was, and he had said, "Poetry." Till then she had imagined that poetry was a thing in books in short lines with a lot of capital letters in the wrong places.

So she had put him on the vacant throne and worshipped him afar; but they had never met again. Once she rode to Pukerau and called at the schoolroom; but she was met by a cheerful young schoolmistress with spectacles and a city blouse, and had been too confused to ask where her knight-errant had gone. Aroha was sure that he was strong; when he danced with her his strength had almost frightened her. But it was difficult work to continue loyally to adore when the prince never visited his dominions. So he, too, was cast out of her dreams.

Then there was a superbly-gloved youth she had met in the train on her way home. He had got her a cup of tea with an infinite grace. He had a moustache and smoked cigars. But he was far from her thoughts; he dwelt in a land impossible, of which she had caught bewildered glances in the *Family Herald*. With every wish to compass it she could

never see herself in his arms. And for the girl it was now necessary that her fairy prince should be sufficiently human to desire to embrace her. Once she had been content to be put on a pedestal and worshipped; but with her approaching womanhood newer and more insistent desires stirred in her. Unconsciously her whole being cried out for love. And, after all, there was no fairy prince!

So she went back to her dreams and revelled in her rich imagination. For the present she must weave her own romances; but she felt assured that one day a reality, more glorious than all her desires, would step into her dreams and carry her off to heaven. Her life would be but one strand in a woven web of splendour.

And she knew exactly the way he would come. She had learnt that—oh! so long ago! Over the saddle towards which she was now slowly moving, a few hundred paces off, he would suddenly come, riding up the long slope that led to this narrow ridge from the valleys and hollows of the great world outside.

So on every one of her many visits to the top of the valley she would pause a while in a sudden, delicious, half-feigned terror, and then run to the ridge with an equally delicious, half-feigned expectation, only to find ever the same picture—a yellow sweep of valley running down into a nest of level land lost among a monotony of broad-shouldered hills, and against the horizon a jagged line of glistening, snow-clad peaks. And though her keen eyes sought ever for his figure, never on any day came the fairy prince, sturdily breasting the long tussock slope.

Yet this afternoon, as Aroha, under the influence of her childish dreams, quickened her pace, and

almost ran toward the narrow line of wind-swept tussocks, she had in her heart the same delicious, half-feigned certainty of surprise. She reached the top of the ridge and gazed beyond.

And, careering swiftly towards her, swept a terrified horse—riderless.

III

AROHA stood one terrified moment, then ran forward down the slope. The horse swerved past her at a gallop and disappeared over the crest of the hill. Even in her anxiety she recognised the animal; it was one of the riding hacks from Hathaway's run.

There was nobody in sight. She slackened her pace with a sense of dismay. The horse had gone; even the thud of its hoofs on the ground had died away. The incident seemed almost unreal. She was quite alone; only a hawk stood high and black and motionless in the windy sky.

From the tussocks that had concealed him rose a figure, and the girl's heart said tumultuously, "The Fairy Prince!" but it was only a boy—certainly not twenty years old—who had been thrown from his horse. He came limping towards Aroha, dazed and bleeding and angered.

"Where's my horse?" he asked hurriedly, and paused at gaze.

Something checked the eager inquiry on the girl's lips, too; and for a minute these two looked at each other, shut in by the infinite loneliness of hill and sky, almost with an air of recognition. The conviction swept suddenly over each that they had met before—when? . . . how long ago? . . . in what other unimaginable world?

The wind swept the waving yellow tussock slope, the white cloudlets sped across the turquoise sky,

the solitary hawk paused on wide wings watching. It seemed as if the whole world waited for some approaching miracle. So they stood—boy and girl—at gaze.

And to these two young souls those few moments were an eternity. In that startled interchange of glance the old patient world was weaving two lives into one. And the pattern was of a wondrous hue, and the woof thereof was love.

Aroha was dressed in an old blue print gown, whose short skirt was a reminiscence of her seventeenth year. Nineteen years demanded another six inches. Beneath its ragged edge the creases of her thick stockings about her ankles plainly showed. On her feet were thick-soled, stubby-toed shoes. On her head, tilted back, was a faded blue sun-bonnet that had known many washings.

To the boy this homely-attired girl seemed hardly human—an ærial thing poised between him and the sky, a frail spirit impalpable, maybe the soul of this wide expanse of tussock land. Her figure was slight, too girlish for her nineteen years, but in New Zealand youth lingers long. She wore no corsets, and as she leaned, swaying with a supple grace against the audacious wind, the loose, blue print dress displayed the outline of her long slim limbs and the sweep of her boyish breasts.

From beneath her sun-bonnet a few wisps of brown hair strayed—deeply brown in shadow, but chestnut when the sunlight lifted it in his golden fingers. Her eyes were richly brown—of the hue that is too vivid and warm for black, too dark for brown. There was passion in those eyes, but there was reserve and strength. Above them her eyebrows ran toward each other, not meeting but ending with a wonderful upward ripple that gave her face a

strangely arresting and ethereal charm. Her nose almost had an irresponsible tilt; but the firm, full lips, and the deliberate chin gave the face a gravity and a strength rare in womanhood. The keen, crisp winds of this land of the far south had stung her cheeks into a rich brown glow.

And to King Southern, a-stare, she was the most beautiful woman he had ever dreamed of.

"Did you—I beg your pardon—but did you see where my horse went?" he said at last, groping for words, reluctant to break this strange silence that seemed to have bound them about with chains.

"Oh, he went over the ridge. I guess by this he's down at the homestead gate," she replied almost as unwillingly. Then a quick sympathy leapt into her face, and she cried, "But, oh, you're hurt?"

Her voice was rich and wonderful. An aroma of youth seemed to come from her presence. King had never imagined that a woman could have such a voice. He saw at once that all his conceptions of womanhood—and he had many—would have to be revised. He had not taken into account the great factor of a woman's voice.

"Hurt?" he echoed. "Yes, I suppose so." He looked down at his leg with a certain sense of its complete detachment from his concerns. In the presence of such a being a mere bruised ankle seemed an unwarrantable intrusion.

"I don't think it's much," he said at length, gingerly trusting his weight upon the foot. "I'm not much of a rider, you know; and the horse's leg seemed to give way all at once, and I found myself among the tussocks. I think I came off over his shoulder."

"Put his foot in a rabbit-hole," she explained.

"Oh, that's it?" he said, enlightened. Then his wondering gaze returned to her.

"But who—" he said and stopped.

Suddenly the girl beneath his gaze became self-conscious. She remembered the shortness of the old skirt. She felt annoyed at herself caught at this hateful disadvantage by a mere boy. She understood from his glance the thickness of her stockings, the ugliness of her shoes. She moved behind a big tussock that concealed at least her feet from his eyes.

"Oh, me?" she said, "I'm Aroha—Aroha Grey. We live down there; that's our station—Westella, it's called. You can see the homestead from the top of the ridge."

She moved quickly up the slope and gained the crest. The boy paused to watch her. He noticed her swift, lithe stride, the sinuous grace of her every movement. He never remembered having seen a woman walk so easily. She swam.

She did not turn. "That's the station," she said, pointing. Far down the valley she could see a black speck. It was the horse that had been stopped by the barbed wire fence of the top paddock.

But the boy made no response. She turned. He was limping painfully toward her.

Immediately she was at his side. "Oh, you're hurt, you're hurt!" she cried in a low voice.

"No, no!" he said, almost angrily.

"Let me help you. Lean on my shoulder," she commanded.

He drew himself erect.

"Thank you," he said stiffly. "I can manage by myself."

"You can't," she declared. "You must let me help you; I am stronger than you."

She put her arm, slim and muscular, about his waist. The warm, soft touch of it thrilled him strangely. It was the first time that a girl's arm had been about him.

But to be succoured by a woman, a mere girl! He shook himself roughly from her.

"Stronger?" he said with scorn. "A woman stronger than a man?"

Instantly she was abashed. How could she be stronger than he—her fairy prince? It was his strength that was to be the sceptre that would rule her heart. But—and she flushed—surely she had not so soon accepted him as her fairy prince? She shot an intent look at him. That her fairy prince? A mere boy, thin, sallow-faced, with large dark eyes and lips that were almost a woman's. The well-cut nose and the spacious brow redeemed the features, but the mouth and chin were—her mind leapt at the word—weak. He was a boy, unmarked by the lines that life would give; he was likable, lovable, perhaps. It was a handsome face, but not—ah, never!—the face of a leader of men. Here was no conquering prince. He had the eyes of a dreamer, the infinitely sad eyes of a dreamer. And yet . . .

She was recalled to herself by a sudden blanching of the boy's face. He stood a moment swaying and would have fallen had she not leant forward and caught him in her arms. She was almost as tall as he. He steadied himself at her touch. She saw the perspiration on his forehead, the little dent between the brows.

"Thanks," he said gratefully. "I'm afraid you are—stronger than me, after all!"

In a moment she was all mother. "If you can walk like this, I'll help you down to our homestead; but, perhaps, I had better leave you

here and run down and get a dray sent up for you?"

King hesitated. It would be horrible to go down to the homestead a mere helpless weight on a girl's arm. But he felt her presence very near him. Her face, keenly pitying, was at his shoulder. Her eyes made him waver. It was very well to stand thus; and she was divinely near. The setting sun lay upon the valley, flinging the hills ablaze. Her face was lit as with an exaltation hardly human. He looked into her eyes. She returned the glance frankly, proudly, triumphantly—the unconscious look of the woman who has found her mate.

So the boy and the girl were held one moment silent, with steady eyes. And in that moment the earth completed her deliberate, age-old plan, weaving these diverse two into a bond inseparable. Time and Life might break that bond; their paths that had so haphazardly crossed, might sweep apart, never in this wide vastness of the world to meet again. It mattered not; that moment had broken down the barriers. They would move apart changed, each carrying something of the soul of the other, each leaving something of a soul behind. Of that moment a child had been born that would live and grow eternally. This patient old earth had done her part.

And boy and girl felt only a great glow of happiness inexplicable. Of the great alchemy of life, of the grand experiment made by that ancient chemist upon them, they were blindly ignorant. Only to each in that moment it seemed as if somewhere, afar off, there was a faint sound of singing. . . .

"I think, if you don't mind, I can get down with you helping me," he said.

The sun stood on the farthest range of golden

hills. About them waved the wide ocean of tussocks.

So, facing the sun, the two moved slowly over the tussocks, sinking together into the darkening valley.

IV

It was a new Aroha, less ethereal, more human, that King saw that evening at the homestead. She had changed her short gown for a skirt that emphasised her slim tallness; at her throat was a piece of lace, and her hair had been laboriously smoothed from its rebellion, and lay in heavy waves of glowing brown upon her head. She had grown from the spirit of the waste to a woman, conscious of her sex, hedged round with home-keeping things. King felt dumbly uneasy at the change; it seemed a desecration.

As the two slowly passed the woolshed that afternoon, John, the ploughman, was leading the captured horse to the stable. He paused to throw a sullen scowl at the intruder. Aroha breathlessly explained. John turned and went into the stable. The boy felt his antagonism like a stab.

At the back porch stood the girl's mother, a tall, gracious, strong woman whose sleeves tucked to the elbow displayed arms brown and robust. Her face was that of a brunette, and her dreamy, dark eyes and full-lipped mouth startled King with some vague memory. Somewhere he had seen her type before.

She came swiftly forward, moving with a swinging litheness that suggested the movements of a wild animal.

"Aroha, are you hurt?" she cried.

King noticed the vibrant quality in her voice. It was richer than the girl's, but in Aroha's tones there

was less the quality of the reed, a note infinitely more human.

"Me? No!" laughed Aroha, nervously, for the first time seeing the necessity and the difficulty of an explanation. "But he—this—"

She had not even asked him his name. Her fairy prince . . . . and she mightn't like his name!

The boy had seen the quick relief that came into the mother's face as the girl reassured her. Surely these two loved and understood each other!

"My name is Southern—King Southern," he said. "I'm staying at the Hathaways' station for a holiday. I was out riding—I'm not much of a rider—and my horse put his foot in a rabbit-hole, and I came off, and I think I've twisted my ankle."

"Ah, you must come in and lie down, and not think of moving till it's better. Poor boy!"

So he had been given the sofa near the big open fireplace in the dining-room, and the girl, infinitely tender and proud, had put hot and cold bandages over the throbbing ankle, till its pain eased gradually down to a vague discomfort. Then she had slipped away and returned a new Aroha, more homely, more human.

That evening remained long in the boy's memory. He lay, like a monarch enthroned, on the sofa and watched the mother and the girl busy about their work. Mrs Grey was darning stockings, and Aroha had brought in a big basin and a bag of raisins which she proceeded expertly and delicately to stone. He watched the girl's profile in the flickering glare of the slow-burning logs, and noted with a great quiet happiness how often her eyes turned toward him, solicitous about his hurt.

The mother moved about the house, sometimes leaving the two alone together. But on these oc-

casions, eagerly desired, passionately hoped for, the boy found himself suddenly shy. An embarrassed silence fell upon them as the mother left the room: there were such momentous things to say, and it was so difficult to begin. So it was with a sense of relief that the two saw Mrs Grey reappear from the kitchen.

The room was furnished in the usual manner of up-country stations. There was the usual number of bad-coloured prints, execrably framed in elaborate monumental frames of corks and pine-cones, the usual almanacs pinned to the wall, the fading uninteresting photographs of faded uninteresting people, the usual suite of horsehair furniture with the usual glacial sofa, the usual collection of shells and curious stones picked up on the run, and on the floor the usual sheep-skin and rabbit-skin rugs, and the usual polychromatic unravelled woollen mats.

Hanging beside the mantelpiece was a finely-polished piece of greenstone. The beautiful workmanship displayed upon this Maori war-club at once attracted King's eyes. The girl, noting his glance, dipped her fingers in a bowl of hot water, wiped them on her apron, rose and took down the merë from the wall.

"It belonged to my great-grandfather," she said, with pride.

"But how did he get it?" he asked in surprise. Such a fine piece of greenstone, so elaborately carved and polished, was of great value and evident antiquity. The number of these translucent, greenish jade war-weapons in Maoriland is not many, and every one of these merës has a history and an authenticity established by immemorial legend. These war-clubs are so jealously guarded by the Maori tribes that King was surprised to find such a handsome one in the possession of a mere pakeha.

"He got it from his ancestors. It has been handed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years. Mother knows all its history."

King glanced at the girl quickly. She laughed.

"Yes, didn't you know that my great-grandfather was a Maori? My grandmother was a Maori, too. It was through her that we got it."

The mother looked up. The boy saw the dreamy, dark eyes, the broad, low forehead, the full lips. He recalled her gracious bearing, her lithe, gliding walk, her air of gracious dignity. She was a half-caste.

Aroha went on proudly. "He was a great chief. He owned nearly half the Southern Island; for hundreds and hundreds of miles his sway extended. He died long ago, before the white man came here at all. Mother remembers him. He was a fine old man, tattoed and white-haired. He was killed in a fight—the one death a Maori longs for. It was an age-old tribal feud; for generations these two great tribes had fought each other in the chivalrous Maori fashion, giving each other notice of their coming, succouring each other with gifts of food in order that the fight might be a fair one—a mighty series of hand-to-hand conflicts, chief opposed to chief according to their rank. Sometimes there were surprises, though, and it was in one of these that this old warrior was killed. He was the first chief—as was his jealously-guarded right—to get inside the enemy's palisade, and as he descended he slipped in a pool of blood, and as he fell a chief's taiaha knocked him senseless. Afterwards they killed him, tortured him—the brutes! But his tribe, that had withdrawn at the news of his death, revenged his fate, exterminated most of the enemy, enslaved many—and terminated the feud by eating the rest!"

With a grim laugh the girl ended her tale. For as she recited the story, some trait of her ancestral savagery woke, and a barbaric frenzy fired her body with a rhythmic motion, and swept the blood to her cheek. As she stood above him, tall and lithe and wonderful, she seemed the princess of some olden legend, the re-incarnation of a primitive race. The mother, too, was strangely stirred by the recital. Her eyes shone, her fingers twisted nervously in and out of her work. The thought leapt to King's mind that here was a fire untamed, a vigour untainted, the strength of a virgin race. Dowered with this racial youth the girl had in her forces unawakened, strengths unguessed. Beneath that beautiful face and the slim, graceful figure smouldered fires unquenchable. What barriers (he vaguely phrased it) had this old world to that virgin strength, that rich, inexhaustible vitality?

But in a moment she was a pakeha again—a simple, unemotional, self-controlled English girl.

"I like those old times," she said. "And mother likes me for liking them—don't you, dear?"

She laid her hand gently on the elder woman's hair. Her mother caught her other hand in a close caress.

Then Aroha told of her childhood. She pointed to the portrait of her father. It was a gentle, lovable face, not the face of a successful man—and, indeed, he had not been a success in life. He had been the last of an Essex family that had once owned many acres in England. But the fortunes of the family had dwindled, and at last there was little left that was not mortgaged. Her father, despairing of rebuilding the prosperity of his race, had emigrated to New Zealand. The old land had meant to him the enervation of his race; but new lands promised

the flowering of new hopes. But he carried to New Zealand too much of the environment that he loved. He had not the alert adaptability necessary for the successful grapple with a new set of circumstances.

Soon after his arrival in Maoriland he had met Aroha's mother. She was the daughter of a rich runholder who had married a Maori chieftainess. Receiving from his bride great tracts of land he had prospered much, and had given his only daughter a thorough English education. Hinë te Ao, "Daughter of Light," as he fondly named her, grew up a beautiful girl, and Mr Grey had fallen in love with this beautiful brunette, who, acquiring civilisation with the astonishing rapidity of this splendid race, had yet retained a magnificent beauty and an unconquerable vigour that, to the tall, debonair Englishman, were enchanting. He married her, and theirs was a happy life. To her husband Hinë te Ao was ever a daughter of light.

With characteristic recklessness he had taken up the Westella run, and started, without preparation, the difficult business of sheep-farming. His experience cost him much. The dowry that came to him with his wife rapidly melted away, and year after year he had laboured on, sinking deeper and deeper beneath a sea of mortgages.

At last he had died. His grave was on the hillside—a little space fenced in with barbed wire to keep the cattle out.

He had failed in life, if inability to make money means failure, but to the mother and the girl his life had been one long triumph of kindness and quiet love. He had been very proud of the little daughter who seemed dimly to promise the realisation of all that had eluded him. She was a type

of this fertile, virgin land. It was one of his greatest griefs that he could not afford to send her to a school in Dunedin, nor could he in those early days of the colony get a governess to stay at this lonely and out-of-the-way station. Perhaps it was his fear of the great loneliness that seemed to encompass him that prevented him making the often-determined-upon effort to send her for a few years to Dunedin. And between father and mother the daughter was roughly educated. He had called her "Aroha," the Maori word for Love, with a vague hope that the girl's heart would find in love the compensation that life seemed to have withheld from her.

So her father had relinquished life—almost easily. It was a frail thing he had taken in his hand and gladly let fall. Only, there was his wife and Aroha. But he had no fears for his daughter. She belonged to a new and insistent race that would make the future its own. The gods love youth, and it was among the youthful nations of the earth that the world would be divided. So he turned away from life, half satisfied.

Then, five years ago, the widow had set to work to repair the breach that fate had made in their lives. She was a capable manager, but in her husband's life she had been too subservient to his personality to prevent him from making costly blunders. But now she had been left alone, charged with the future of her child, and she set to work in earnest. This gracious, stately woman took over the management of the run, and inaugurated a new reign of efficiency and economy.

Already the tide of expenses had turned, and the last year had shown a profit on the working of the estate. Some portion of the heavy mortgage was already paid off.

King did not learn this history that evening. For that night he was too tired to listen, and the women did not weary him with much talk. At nine o'clock Aroha left the room to set the bread, for to-morrow was the most important day of the week—"new bread day."

Mrs Grey showed King to his room. As he was undressing he heard a step from the kitchen, and as the girl passed his door she called softly "Good-night."

Then her footsteps died away.

But once in bed he did not sleep. "Aroha!" he whispered to himself, "Aroha! . . . Love!" And at the meaning of the name his face burned. She was the embodiment of love. But when she had spoken her name it had carried to his ears a melody that now seemed strangely lacking. No, he could not recall the precise intonation that seemed to him so rich and glorious. But little fragments of her conversation—in her actual voice, it seemed—came to him as he lay awake. In the darkness he caught fleeting glimpses of her face. He saw her again as she looked swiftly up at him across the table, and he glimpsed for the first time the full richness of her dusky eyes. His eyes followed the swift movements of her slim fingers busy with the raisins. He noted the slow swaying of her bosom as she breathed. He watched the lithe, swinging, erect ease of her walk. He caught a too brief glimpse of her as she stood a moment, wind-buffeted and swaying, against the skyline on the hill, delicate as a just-poised butterfly. And on his ear came once more the full colour of her voice as she laughed. Then his mind came back again to her name, and dwelt there. "Aroha! . . . Aroha!"

Outside, a sheep dog barked suddenly, and King

felt the succeeding stillness heavily upon him. The house was very quiet. Then vaguely came upon the boy's ear a sound that seemed infinitely distant. It seemed to him like the faint whisper of a little breeze over the tussocks. Once more he was standing on that ridge—

Then suddenly he was wide awake, listening. The house, like most up-country houses, had been built haphazardly, at various intervals. If another room was wanted, another room—not always at the same level—was added, or a thin partition of boards divided a large room into two. In an instant the boy knew.

In the room adjoining his someone was sleeping. The bed was against the partition, and in the silence there came clearly to his ears the faint rustle of the bed-clothes, the soft sigh of the breath of a woman deeply sleeping. He divined that it was Aroha.

A sense of desecration came upon him. He had intruded into a temple, sacred as another's heart. He resolutely shut the sound from his consciousness, and felt his cheek hot.

Yet, after a little interval, he found himself listening. The girl was deeply sleeping. He heard her bosom rise and fall, the faint rustle of the linen came to him like an intimate whisper. She was asleep, and he tossed restlessly awake. Did this meeting matter so little to her, so much to him? But gradually the quiet ebb and flow of that gently-taken breath brought a deep balm upon the boy.

He lay long listening in a delicate delight, drowned in a deep glad consciousness of the utter nearness of her presence to him. It seemed to him that together, hand in hand, they went into paradise. . . .

V

AROHA was the offspring of a new country, the child of a virgin soil. Between her generation and that of her father there was a great barrier. For she had been born in New Zealand. He looked back with a fond pride and an inherent satisfaction to the old land that had borne him. In England he had left half himself. His memories were of that little island of the North; he was the child of the past, the inheritor of history. England's traditions had so wrapped themselves about his personality that in this new land he could not shake them off. Nay; he was incapable of wishing to disencumber himself of his traditions. His early training, his inherited outlook coloured all his life. At times he felt a dumb rage that this strange far-south colony, in which he was ever an exile, should so resemble England. The very likenesses that sometimes showed themselves mocked him with their inherent dissimilarity. He had been transplanted merely—not uprooted. He was the product of generations of his race; in him their characteristics, rudely flung to the other side of the globe, heroically persisted. Under these new skies in which glittered a chaos of unfamiliar stars, he continued to grow, to develop; but the fruits were not the fruits of the new soil—merely a sickly maturing of the process begun under different auspices a hemisphere away.

He looked yearningly back across the wide stretch

of sea that lay between his own land and this: his heart had never crossed the tropics. To him England was the "Home" that so many colonists unthinkingly name a land they have never seen, probably never will see. Here he was decentred, set upon the outer fringe of the world. At night he looked apprehensively out upon the other side of the universe. His heart sickened when he realised how far he was from Charing Cross, how impossible it was that he would ever stroll down the Strand.

Distance stood at the gate like an implacable angel of the flaming sword. He was outlawed from civilisation, set in a land that was not even finished.

But Aroha knew England not even in memories. Here was her birthplace, here her home. To her father's stories of his home she listened almost as to a traveller's tale. It was all very interesting, very quaint and strange; but what had it to do with her? Maoriland was hers—a land familiar and affine. She was born here; here she would live and die. To her the little fenced grave on the wind-swept hillside seemed sadly incongruous. Her father at last lay in a land strange and hostile to him. She wondered sometimes whether he was really at rest. She pictured herself buried in some far land, perhaps in that unknown England, and knew she would not be content.

But this wide, wild tussock land was hers. It knew and accepted her. She was part of this wide sweep of hill and valley, she belonged to this great domain of creek and flat and gully and swamp. The scour of the ever-hurrying winds, the outpour of the ever-brilliant sun had made her what she was; something of the wind and the sun and the keen, quick air was in her soul.

She did not look back. It was interesting, as

books of history were interesting, to hear her father speak of his ancestors, to picture the long, unchanging, continuous life of his ancient family. But they belonged to another race. They were all dead, buried in a land she had never seen, scarcely desired to see. That story has come to its last chapter; those ancestors of hers had finished their great drama. She knew that if they were able to learn of her they would not approve of her, would not even recognise her as a descendant of their greatness. Their story belonged to England. In that little fenced grave on the alien hillside all the long accumulations of history, all those glorious legends and high ideals were ignominiously buried. That was where that long-hoarded greatness had come at last to rest.

She had the present about her, she looked ahead. In this new land history had hardly begun to take tangible form. Her mother's people, the Maoris, had their legends, their mythology; but they had not impressed them upon the land. The brown conquerors of this world-forgotten island group had built only in wood, and already their mark upon the land was beginning to fade. Their wonderfully-carved wharës could not long survive destruction, and already the art of carving was dying out. And though the race was not dying out, its impress upon history was destined to become fainter. Its destiny was intermarriage with the pakeha—and though thus it would bestow upon the New Zealand race of the future a physique and a vitality that belong to primitive things, a gift that would carry the new race far—as a people the brown Maori must cease—submerged beneath the greater number of the whites.

But in that most impalpable thing, language, the Maori had builded better than in his carven wood.

He had made his inalienable impress upon the land by the great store of names with which he had dowered these islands. Every hill, every gully, every spur, every creek, every fishing-ground, every tribal limit, had its musical Maori name—to the untrained eye a little terrifying, but very liquid, very soft and sweet upon the tongue. The Italian skies of this southern land seemed to have given an Italian wealth of vowels to the speech of its people. And every name was a poem, the rude nature-poems of a primitive people, that reached in one swift word to the utter heart of things.

So over this new country history brooded but vaguely, a haunting sense of the things that had been, of stories past and irrevocable.

To Aroha it was yet a land of newness. To the girl's sight a cemetery was a rare thing; the little scattered burial-places of the settlers were few and far-hidden. In this unstoried place a tombstone was an anachronism. It seemed as if the people of this new land were almost ashamed of their dead.

Aroha had never seen an old building. In her districts the churches were but wooden erections that, during the week-days, served their main use as schoolrooms or entertainment halls. Even the stone churches in Dunedin were new. Time had not ventured to lay his transfiguring hand on them. The ivy was just beginning to climb their walls. It was difficult to be religious in a land that knew not Antiquity with her finger on her lips.

So Aroha looked forward to the vague promise of the future. She began another race, she belonged to a newer people, a nation that had no past.

In her veins was the blood of the English; but she was thrilled by the ichor of that other race. Hers were those brown warriors of the past, adventuring in

their great canoes thousands of leagues over unknown waters, a Columbus race ever questing for lands unseen, a nation of Alexanders tired of the long unchanging tropic peace of Hawaiki, stirred by the thought of new worlds to conquer. For, leaving the known and the familiar behind, they had set out in their great canoes and plunged deeply into the mysterious South, seeking vague lands in the forgotten regions of the earth, drawn irresistibly onwards by legends dimly whispered and rumours borne upon the strenuous winds of the Pacific. So they had ventured and voyaged deeper and deeper into the unknown, till at last their keels came to rest in the white sand of the beaches of New Zealand. But the island group was not untenanted. A weak and peaceful race they found already in possession, but before the onslaught of this fierce race of conquerors the ranks of the primitive Moriori melted away.

It was surely a deep instinct for racial preservation that had prompted this tropical race to leave the lotus islands of the Pacific and dive into the colder waters of the South, sternly seeking a ruder, healthier home. It was only by that spartan plunge that the race could regain its strength and hardiness after too long a sojourn in the soft ease of the tropics.

They had voyaged far, that race of brown Ulysses, and they had found their Fortunate Isles. From India, cradle of nations, they were said to have come in the days when the Himalaya tableland sent forth its nations to people the world; and, drifting gradually out into the Pacific and leaving behind as they slowly wended from island to island the cooler and less adventurous spirits of their race, they had pressed ever onwards, eastwards and southwards, conquering and colonizing as they drove, until the drifting ice-

bergs of the Antarctic fixed the barrier to their quest.

The blood of this people was in Aroha's veins, their story in her heart. She knew the tale of her mother's tribe: back and back the generations went, name after name famous in Maori history she could recite, until at last she reached the founder of her tribe, the famous chief who had commanded one of the five great canoes that had headed the first migration of the Maoris to these dimly-divined shores. She knew that great chief's name, the name of the canoe in which he came, of the very beach upon which its double keel stranded. But beyond that history said nothing and legends but dimly whispered. And beyond that Aroha did not care to go. She was a New Zealander. This land and she were kin. The Maori had made it his own by the might of his arm, and after him had come a stronger race, and to this pallid, strange people, though not till after a worthy fight, in his turn the Maori had given way.

In Aroha these two long lines of conquerors fused and blended. She stood at the beginning of a new race, alert for the possibilities of the ever-widening future. A hemisphere separated her from her father, a dying history cut her off from her mother. She began another race, she belonged to a newer people, a nation that had no past.

VI

NEXT morning King's ankle was sufficiently recovered for him to mount his horse, and after breakfast he announced his intention of riding to the Hathaways' homestead. Aroha accompanied him on her mare as far as the dip in the saddle separating the two valleys. King was a poor rider, like many colonials, whom the English comfortably picture as clad in soft red shirts and sombrero hats, ever riding wildly over rough country to a fusillade of cracking stockwhips. King had spent his life in a town, where he had little to do with horses. But the girl sat her mare with a superb grace. In this lonely back-blocks country she usually rode astride, man's fashion ; but this morning she had reluctantly asked John to get out her rarely-used side-saddle, and had struggled into an unaccustomed riding skirt. She wondered if such a sacrifice of the feeling of freedom was necessary, whether a real fairy prince was worth the trouble? This prosaic detail had not occurred to her before. In her dreams the fairy prince had always swept her tumultuously to his saddle and galloped off with her arms about his neck. And the real fairy prince could just manage to keep his own saddle.

There was little conversation as the two rode up the valley. The chill of the morning was upon them both—that strange sense of separation, that conviction of loneliness that comes upon man in the naked

light of the day. King's heart was oppressed by the thought that he was riding out of Aroha's life. But the girl's heart was light: she knew.

At the top of the saddle she drew her bridle short. "Good-bye," she said, and smiled.

"Good-bye," he stammered, miserable.

She looked straightly at him and paused. King's heart beat wildly.

"And—" she paused. "You must put a hot-water bandage on that ankle as soon as you get home."

"Yes?" he said tentatively. He had hoped for such a different speech.

"And you'll have to lie up for a day or two and nurse it."

"But I want to see you again, to—"

"No, no; you mustn't. Your ankle—"

She was cruelly indifferent this morning. He vaguely wondered if this woman was the spirit of the hills that he had met between the earth and the sky.

Perhaps if he had looked keenly at her he would have seen that she was summing him up. He was at the judgment-bar of a woman's heart.

"Good-bye," she called, as she shook her reins, "and—don't forget about the bandages."

The next minute her horse had disappeared at a canter over the ridge. King moved miserably down the slope towards the Hathaways'. If he had glanced back ten minutes later, he would have seen the girl sitting upon her horse, once more outlined against the sky, still as a stone. She was watching him, judging him, proving his claim to the fairy princedom of her heart.

And with a little genuine disapproval she admitted to herself that already the prince, rightful or pretending, was upon the throne.

With a sigh she turned her horse and rode down to the homestead to superintend the baking of the bread.

And though the girl came often on sunny afternoons to the ridge she never saw in the distance a rider breasting the long slope, spurring swiftly to claim his vassal kingdom.

But one afternoon a week later she heard King's voice at the porch of her home. His ankle was almost well, he told her, as, with a swift glance of dismay at her workaday dress and untidy hair, she ran out to greet him. He went on to say that he had faithfully followed her directions; the hot-water bandages had been assiduously applied by Mary Hathaway.

This information Aroha felt to be a little needless. As soon as she had learnt that King was staying at the Hathaways', she had thought of Mary. And during the last week she had thought a great deal about her. She had even gone as far as to picture Mary applying those bandages, and it needed a careful and discriminating study of Aroha's pretty features in the cracked looking-glass in her wee bedroom to dismiss that picture from her mind. Providence had been good to give Mary such a liberal dower of freckles and such a largesse of nose. She never did care for Mary.

King noticed that the mention of Mary was gratuitous. Aroha froze. The throne of the fairy prince tottered. The girl told him that she was exceedingly busy—"exceedingly" was the word she used, and it smote King like a knell—and she would not be able to stand talking at the porch; but if he cared to come in and see her mother . . . ? She added that she yet felt anxious about the ankle, advised him to go home—"immediately" was the word she used, and have it attended to again. He could be sure of

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receiving every attention at the Hathaways'—every possible attention.

King replied, assuring her, with what he felt was somewhat excessive courtesy, that he would follow her advice. No, he would not stay to tea, the ankle was beginning to pain him already, and the sooner he got those bandages renewed the better. So in a cloud of dignity he departed.

And Aroha assured herself that she had done the only thing possible. And then she clenched her long slim fingers in a gust of primitive rage. He was so petty, so boyish, so silly, to bring in that gawky creature's name. Mary had eyebrows and flat hair that were of the colour of mud! As if she cared! Then she went down to the woolshed and made herself unpleasant to John.

After a few days spent by Aroha in alternating moods of haughty scorn and abject regret, chance took her to a part of the run seldom visited save by the daily inspection of the boundary rider. She had not revisited the saddle between the valleys; pride forbade her to so humiliate herself, but this part of the run commanded the only comprehensive view on the station. From the brow of one hill she could even see the Hathaways' homestead. This day, as she breathed her horse at the top of this hill, her glance eagerly scanned the country, and instantly she picked out in the distance a horseman that might be King Southern. She immediately turned her horse's head, proceeding in a direction that would cut his path at right angles. That would leave everything to him.

When they met she had for him a frank smile of welcome. She forgot to inquire about the ankle, and he never mentioned bandages.

So for many days the two came together, learnt

to know each other, quarrelled, sulked, made concessions, and became friends. Friendship for many natures in this complex life of modernity is a fragile and slow growth. Modern individuals have so many corners to their personalities that it is often impossible for them to find other natures with which to harmonise. A growing friendship is a gradual thing, meeting with many checks, many unsuspected revelations, many disappointments, for the tolerance of which time and sympathy are needed. And in the case of love the inherent antagonism of the sexes, even the inherent antagonism of personalities, makes love a thing of sudden disappointments, unforeseen and inexplicable hates.

Only when the barriers are surmounted, only when a woman can say, "Yes, I dislike that side of my lover's character, I was disappointed in that action; but I love him as he is. I would not have one fault away, one weakness erased. That makes him what he is; each little weakness builds up a personality unique and lovable. That is his way; that is himself"—only then does a woman know that love has surmounted the last barrier of self, that love is the most puissant of all things.

So these two blind young souls had their moments of inexpressible happiness, their age-long nights of intolerable anguish, their hard hates, their self-reproaches, their loving kindnesses and their swift compassions. Had Aroha been the gentle maiden of romance, had King been the colourless "walking gentleman" of a modern novel, these anguishes, these raptures had not been. But they both had individualities that conflicted and persistently strove, that would not give assent to a tardy truce. Each must love wholly or love not at all. Each heart must be quite sure.

But to the boy and the girl this inevitable jarring of two strong personalities was subconscious. They did not guess the reason for all the unhappinesses, all the splendours that came to their souls; they did not understand how inevitable such a conflict was. King felt dimly that he did not show at his best before the girl; never before had he seen his weaknesses and his meannesses come so readily to the surface. She divined of his thoughts too much. And Aroha never knew before that she could be so captious, so many-mooded, so bad-tempered, so hasty of judgment, so needlessly cruel.

At the end of a fortnight Aroha did not know whether she liked or hated King the more. But that she was in love with him, heedlessly in love with him, she knew.

He told her of his life, his ambitions, his hopes. His father was an Anglican clergyman in Dunedin, a man in whose quick brain the logical faculty had developed at the expense of his emotional characteristics. He chilled the boy. But his mother compensated. She did not understand her only child; but love knows no bounds, and her blind, patient sympathy and foolish mother-tenderness helped more to the development of the boy than his father's too penetrating analysis of him. The father understood, the mother loved. Between his father and himself was the swift understanding of the intellect, but between his mother and himself was the swifter understanding of the heart. The son stood outside his mother's brain, outside his father's heart. So ever he remained apart from his father's life, while there were moods in which he was all his mother's.

King was at present studying for the legal profession. He was in his first term at Otago Uni-

versity; this was his first summer vacation. But he had his ideals. Youth always has its ideals. That is the pitiable thing about youth, when we look back. He hated the idea of becoming a lawyer; he worked at it because he was at the university; but his longings were far other. Almost with a blush, certainly with an apology, King told the girl of his ambition. He would be an artist. In her soul Aroha clapped hands. And as he went on to tell her how sure he was of his ability to paint, how art called him ever, the girl edged closer to him. He was indeed a fairy prince; art was the vassal kingdom into which he would make his triumphing way. He told her of his dreams, his plans. He would study in Dunedin, then go to Sydney, perhaps to Paris! It all seemed so big, so marvellous, and yet so near, so wonderfully close! Enchantment was about the girl.

And when next day he showed her a pencil sketch of her face done from memory, she laughed in a rich delight. This was a homage that she had dreamt not of.

But something in the boy's references to the drudgery of his law studies aroused in Aroha a vague resentment.

"I don't like to hear you run down hard work," she said. "Painting must be a delightful occupation, but we all have to work—haven't we?"

"Don't I work at my art?" he said, with boyish inflation of phrase. "Isn't drawing and painting work, just as much as passing examinations in jurisprudence?"

"Or stoning raisins, or making bread, or milking?" she said. "Yes, but art seems a different sort of work, almost a pastime, a play. But we all have to do the hard, uninteresting kinds of work, and yet

it is just that kind of work that is necessary to make this life tolerable. But why do you want to be a great artist?"

The boy paused. It had always seemed to him a sufficient fact in itself.

"Why, to paint a great picture!" he said.

"But why?"

"Because, just for the pleasure I would have in being able to do it."

"Surely that is not enough? Work must be done for some other reason than the mere joy in doing it. It seems to me that your art is only your amusement, after all. If we managed our run on your principle, there would be a lot of dirty jobs undone."

"But isn't it better to paint a great picture than to to be a mere lawyer?"

"Or build a house, or grow sheep?" she questioned, laughing. "No, there is a lot of work I don't like, can't like; but it has just got to be done."

"But haven't you got any ambition to be great, to do something great."

In the boy ambition was the only spur. Dimly he felt that he possessed a great unusual talent. He had been given a capacity to draw, to see colour and form, as, it seemed to him, few others in this world could see it. He had been set apart from the rest of humanity by a special grace; he was an artist. Hence the common life was not for him. It was his duty to himself, to the race—(please remember that King was young yet)—to develop that talent to the uttermost, to make the fullest use of his great gift. For him, apart from the use of that talent, life did not exist. He was unable to conceive what existence would be for him, were he deprived of his ability to see colour and beauty as subtly as he saw

them. He could not enter into the mind of those—the vast majority of the race—who had no such special gift. He disdained to exalt himself above them, so he said to himself with the magnanimity of youth; but he could not escape from the fact that he was marked out from the crowd by a special sign. He was one of the elect of the earth.

(Perhaps you will say that King was a prig. All I will say is that he was very young. Though, perhaps, later on, King himself came to the conclusion you have already reached.)

It was only vaguely that he comprehended that there were masses of individuals whose outlook on life held no glamour of ambition. He scarcely understood the drab and neutral universe in which these colourless entities dwelt. That there were millions who were content to do their duty humbly, to proceed uncomplainingly from task to task, to live from day to day the same uneventful round, to look no further ahead than the next sunrise, and to die at the end of their monotonous lives, not chafing at the thought of unachieved possibilities, not rebels of fate, but resigned to their portion of labour and cheerful in the dim gratification of duty done—this, to King Southern, artist and prig-presumptive, was unguessed at.

Something of this he told Aroha confusedly.

The girl smiled. "How he believes in himself!" she thought, with a sudden uncalled-for admiration. "He is so sure, so self-secure! He must be an artist. He will win fame. Only"—(and her heart was for a moment stilled)—"if he ever learns to doubt himself, to mistrust his talent, I am afraid for him." Then a swift compassion swept over her. "But if ever that moment comes," she thought, "I

shall be there to help him, to nurse him, to shield him, to mother him!"

"King," she said, after a long silence, "you must not despise common, monotonous work. For," she added with a quiet dignity, "that is the only sort of work I can do myself."

VII

It was the last day of King's stay in the country. To-morrow he would have to return to Dunedin. He had ridden over from the Hathaways' station to Westella and asked Aroha to go a ride with him. The girl refused ; she could not spare the time. The boy pleaded ; it was his last day. The girl relented. But when King offered to fetch her mare from the home paddock, she announced that it was already in the stable. She had caught the mare before breakfast—in case.

So, boy and girl, they rode from the homestead. As they walked their horses down the valley they turned aside to skirt a paddock at which John and his team were already busy. The black, up-turned soil lay steaming in the morning sun ; the three furrows moved in regular parallel lines over the undulating ground ; the horses strained sturdily and patiently, the ploughshares slipping through the smooth soil with a quiet, sucking sound. Behind the plough strode John, his eyes fixed upon the furrows ahead, his strong arms inflexibly keeping his team on a path of mathematical straightness. Behind him a trail of seagulls swept wailing, seeking in the dark waves of this strange sea the food they had journeyed so far to find. Perhaps the sea-birds took the plough for some new vessel cutting a dark wake over this steady ocean, following the plough with the same persistence

with which they tracked the steamers across the wastes of the Pacific.

John looked up at the approach of the riders. He sent them a quick, scowling glance, and then ignored them, his eyes upon his team.

"Coo-ee!" cried Aroha, as they approached within shouting distance.

But John did not appear to hear. The creak of the harness, the rattle of the chains, the sough of the ploughshares through the earth might have smothered her clear, high-pitched call. Aroha half-checked her horse, about to "coo-ee" again, but King with an impatient word restrained her. The girl felt a little chilled. The sun that this morning had been so resolutely shining in her heart was suddenly overcast. When everything else was so full of happiness it was a shame that John should not contribute to the sum.

As they left the paddock King said, "There! that is the sort of thing you would rather have me do. Tie myself down day after day to work like that, smother myself in one spot, live a monotonous life out year after year, immerse myself in uninteresting work till I became of no more value than the horse I was driving. I could not do it; I was not made for that."

"You are made to work like the rest of us." Her tones were short and hard. It hurt her to hear John disparaged. He was not the fairy prince, but he had once tried on the robes, and she liked him for that memory. "I hate you when you talk like that," she said, after a silence. "John is a fine fellow. There isn't a man on the run who is more conscientious; he is worth all the rest. He is the best ploughman in the district; he doesn't get drunk—except once or twice a year; he doesn't use bad language except

to the dogs, and I guess they'd feel strange without it."

"But anyone can plough," said King.

"Not so well as John."

"No, but I can do better things, more valuable things."

"More useful things?"

"But I have a special gift."

"So has John—for ploughing. He does it so well that no one could do it better. Could anyone say that of you? It is not a great gift, perhaps, but he makes the best possible use of it. Surely God can't ask more of anyone than that he should do his best with what is given him?"

The boy laughed; it was absurd to argue with a girl—and such a pretty girl!

Indeed, as he glanced at her, she seemed a queen. Upon her richly coloured lips sat a slight scorn; her dark eyes shone with a new seriousness. She looked disdain, and did not guess how adorable anger made her. She was no divinity now; she was wonderfully and entrancingly human. Upon her head perched a little cap, like a skiff upon the great sea of her waving brown hair. The riding jacket and skirt that she wore did not conceal the sweep of her long slender limbs, the delicate outlines of her boyish breasts. As with the paces of her mare she swayed her movements seemed to the boy ebullient with magical and irresistible youth. In every curve of body and limb, in every momentary phase of her ever-varying expression, there breathed love, youth, sex. She was ripe for love, very human, very adorable, inexpressibly near. The boy could almost feel the rich warmth of her white body, the soft, moist touch of her passionate lips.

But the girl's thoughts were not of love. Into her

mind had swept a vision of King as a fairy prince clothed in fine raiment, a delicate butterfly irresponsible upon the air of life, a pretty impalpable thing of fancies. And she turned her mare aside and looked back. In the distance she could see the team of horses moving like flies along the straight edge of the ploughed soil. John, at least, took life seriously. He had his work to do, and he knew how to do it.

And as the ploughman strode in the wake of his team his heart ached with a sullen rage. Who was this thin stripling of a town-bred boy that was carrying Aroha away from him? Why, John could take that weak body of his and break it across his knee, as he would break a manuka stick. What was he? A loafer. And what was there in him that made Aroha so give way to him? This intercourse could come to no good. And if the boy harmed Aroha . . .!

The whip stung the off leader suddenly and venomously; the startled animal swerved, and John swore. It was the worst furrow John had ever ploughed.

The two rode on in silence, the loneliness of the hills and the quiet of the morning about them. At the end of the valley they turned to follow the creek down the gully. As they went deeper into the gully rabbits indolently moved from their path, scampering a few paces and pausing impudently in the open, too sure of their security to dip into that honeycomb of burrows. On the spurs a few gaunt cabbage-trees stood grotesquely against the sky, their ragged tufts of chattering leaves and thin graceful palm stems giving a strangely tropical look to this bleak solitude of the South. About the creek crowded luxuriant flax-bushes, with green blades

glittering and stiff brown sticks withered and dry. Here and there the white pennons of the toë grass fluttered faintly. Upon the flats great bushes of snow grass, like gigantic tussocks, half hid the horses as they passed. Under the hillside slept a little swamp, one waving expanse of raupo, whose array of green reeds seemed like a field of tall corn.

They turned aside from their path to pull a sheep from the swamp. It lay helpless and patient upon its side, sunk in the oozy ground, doomed to a lingering death by the weight of its fleece. But the girl showed the boy how to lift the poor passive thing to its feet, and with a few unsteady steps it made its slow way up the sun-warmed, golden hillside, seeking the flock that two days before had so calmly left it to its fate.

In a sheltering patch of scrub a few miles further on they tethered their horses and had lunch. Aroha boiled the billy. It was a happy meal. Then they mounted to return.

All that day a thought had been tugging at the boy's heart. Was it all to end like this? Were they to separate now on different paths, end it all inconclusively here?

And the girl's contentment was tinged with a faint apprehension. It was all so perfect, so complete, this quiet, sun-laved day among the silence of the hills. Why could not life go on like this for ever?

As the shadows of the spurs crept down the valley the two rode homewards side by side in silence. Then suddenly the boy turned to her, a new insistent note in his voice.

"Aroha!"

It thrilled the girl unwillingly. She felt a little hint of fear. This love to which they had so wondrously awakened was very beautiful, but it

seemed to be coming too near; it might be terrible. In King's voice she felt a sense of manhood. The boy had gone, and in his place, strange and unfamiliar, stood a being older, infinitely more masterful.

She edged her mare away and, unseen by King, touched her with her whip.

"I want so much to speak to you, Aroha," he began, tremulous in his excitement. Then his words came with a rush. "I want to tell you how much I . . . like you, Aroha." He was afraid of the word. It seemed too great a word to be spoken yet.

The girl listened in a thrill of happiness. The insistence of his tones cheated her into a great gladness. No one had ever said "love" to her before; and she knew that in his heart he whispered the word. It was a great and a sweet thing to be loved.

"You know how much I . . . like you," he went on. "I never dreamed that there was anyone like you in the world. I have thought of women, of course—a boy is always imagining the wonder of women—but I dreamed that they were all ethereal things, to be adored afar, to be worshipped with a great humility. But you—*you!*" and there swept through him a sense of the closeness of her presence, the wonder of her youth, the warm splendour of her white body, the unprotected tenderness of her face, the wealth of her full lips.

"You are so near and close and familiar and accessible!" he cried.

He leant from his saddle and attempted to take her hand. Her mare swerved in sudden alarm.

The girl laughed a little nervously. This was too impetuous a wooing. She felt unsafe, too easily assailable, and she could not depend on herself. She

recognised with a sudden stopping of her breath that this was a new Aroha with which she had now to deal, that within her bosom had awakened a traitor that to the enemy would joyously unbar the door.

"You see," she laughed, "Judy does not like you at all."

"But you?" he insisted.

"I—I don't know." She had broken from her dream with a great reluctance, and was alertly awake, suddenly critical. He was saying that he loved her. But did he mean it? Did he know the meaning of the love he so lightly asked? For of this she felt sure, that he could not love her as her heart loved him. Only, her heart was waiting for something. What was it? A tone in his voice that was lacking? Something there was that chilled her —what, she could not divine. Had she irrevocably throned him in her fairy princedom?

She moved her mare close to him. "Come," she laughed audaciously, "you'll have to catch me first!"

Then she was off, full gallop, along the winding gully. He saw her mare disappear among the great tussocks of snow grass. Then he gave his horse the rein and followed. There was no semblance of a track; the way was over the tussocks, through boggy patches, round rocky bluffs, crossing again and again the little winding creek. The snow grass switched his face, stung his hands.

Suddenly he felt his horse give way beneath him, and knew himself falling, as once before when his horse had put its foot in a rabbit hole. He crashed to the ground, rolled free from the animal, and sat up. He was bruised sorely, but the horse seemed no worse for its fall. He quickly picked himself up, caught his horse and remounted. Then, somewhat dazed,

he started once more in the chase. The girl was, of course, out of sight. It was a lonely ride, cheered only by the thought that round the next bluff the girl would be waiting for him, wondering at his lateness. But he traversed the whole length of the gully and turned into the wide valley without seeing her. At last he came in sight of the homestead. The sun had gone early down behind that wall of hills, and the twilight lay like a thin mist in the valley, though the snow-clad mountain peaks gleamed afar like waning beacon-fires.

He steadied his excited horse, and rode slowly up to the homestead. Aroha was standing at the kitchen door. She had changed her riding dress for a house one.

"Tea is ready," she said, as he wearily swung from the saddle. "You know you're rather late!"

A dumb hatred of the girl who could so mock him stirred in the boy's brain. It had all ended so differently!

VIII

At the evening meal Aroha was one long ripple of soft raillery. She laughed at King's horsemanship, mocked at his sullenness. He did not tell her of his fall.

On the table were home-made jams and new-made bread and new-churned butter. There was the inevitable mutton, the mutton that day after day appears on the tables of the settlers throughout the colonies. For, true colonials, in a land where rabbits swarmed like vermin, they would not vary their fare by touching rabbit-flesh. They would have as soon eaten rat.

Looking at Mrs Grey, as she poured out the ever-plentiful tea, King thought that never had she seemed so gracious, so benign. The picture of Roman matrons, of Roman goddesses, rose to his mind. And then his gaze fell on the daughter, and his thoughts grew murderous. The girl's eyes this evening were lit with a new and a dangerous light; to her cheek the rush home through the chill air had brought a wondrous warmth; her figure, pliant as a supple-jack wand, seemed superbly conscious of its own splendid youth. She was so complete, so rounded, so whole! The boy's confidence fainted before her. She was so cruel, so callous; she wanted nothing, not even love!

At eight o'clock he rose to go. It had been a

miserable evening. He could not stand it longer. And his bruises were beginning to pain.

"To-morrow," he said to Mrs Grey, his voice raised that the girl might not lose a syllable. "To-morrow I am going back to Dunedin. I won't see you again —at least not for an age. I want to thank you for all your kindness to me. I won't forget it. And if ever I can return it in any little degree, I—"

Mrs Grey laughed with a good-natured tolerance of his youth. She liked the boy, and thought that her daughter was, to-night, altogether too hard on him. But she remembered one evening when she had been as callous to her lover. After all, men seemed to survive.

She pressed him to come again, and at his melancholy refusal she laughed tolerantly. Some day, perhaps, and the boy looked forlornly forward to that infinitely distant some day.

He put out his hand to say good-bye. The girl and her mother were standing together by the fireplace. Aroha put out her hand quickly. King ignored it, and took her mother's hand. At least, though it seemed nothing to the girl, he would have the touch of her hand to remember last. Then he turned to her. She had gone silently out.

He went out, walking stupidly to the stable. So she would not allow him even the touch of her hand? How inconceivably cruel women could be! Well, it was all a part of her heartless nature. It had been his own fault; he would put her outside his life, forget her utterly.

As he opened the stable door a figure slipped out of the darkness to his side.

"Aroha!" he whispered in a glad surprise.

"Yes," she said demurely, "I thought perhaps

that you couldn't find your bridle. You're so stupid about horses, you know!"

He opened the stable door and drew her into the darkness of the stable.

"Now," he said, and his voice was trembling with a great fear, "now, I want my answer."

"But," she exclaimed, uneasy in his rough grasp, "you didn't catch me?"

"I've caught you now," he said, in a stern triumph.

The girl's heart went still. This was terrible, this rude outburst of passion. Oh, it wasn't a fairy prince at all; it was only a man, a rude, passionate man. She was suddenly nauseated by the physical side of love.

"Stop!" she said hoarsely, and something in that intense repulsion, felt through all her body, prevailed on him. He set her free and the two stood apart. It was quite dark in the stable, yet each saw the other's face, like a pale whiteness infinitely remote.

He could hear her breath coming quickly, hear her bosom irregularly rise and fall. He made an impatient stride to her and caught her hand. She pushed him away.

"No," she whispered. "I am frightened; I don't know. I have dreamed of love—of your loving me, King; and it was sweet to dream, but I did not know, I did not dream that it would be like this. Are men—all men—so rough, so masterful?"

"When they love as I love you," he said hoarsely.

"Love!" she said. "You talk so glibly of love. But I—I don't believe you!"

It came as a cry from the heart. It was the truth at last. She did not believe him; he was not sincere. It was all too easy, too impetuous to be love. Love

meant service, sacrifice. So vaguely her heart had divined.

"King! King!" she said again, an infinite sorrow in her voice. "What is it that keeps us apart?"

"Nothing, nothing, Aroha!"

The girl steadied herself erect against the wall.

"Yes, there is something between us, something in us, in you and me. I cannot tell what it is; but, King, I know it is there." Then, with a sudden quaver in her voice, "Oh, King, how I hate myself for what I am saying!"

He waited in the dark uncomprehendingly. At last he put out his hand gropingly. It touched another hand that had been as blindly outstretched! He drew her gently to him. She was passive to his will, heavy on his arm like a tired child. After all—the thought came gratefully to her—why should she struggle against her love for him? Of that her heart was eternally sure. Yet, if she surrendered to him now, it would be for life. She felt the vastness of the decision, its momentous results. But was this thin doubt insinuating itself into her brain worth the struggle, the barren resistance? She felt her womanhood surge up within her like an irresistible tide. She craved the woman's guerdon; she cried out to be loved.

He loved her; he was saying it over and over again. She loved him. She lay against his breast, his arms strong about her, crushing her, crushing her.

A heavy, slouching step came toward the stable. A man was approaching, swinging a lantern. A shaft of light pierced the darkness of the stable, and before it a grotesque, gigantic shadow flickered. It was John.

A light pierced into Aroha's heart. Strength—

that was the difference between these two men. John was sincere; he loved her. He had never made protestation of it, yet she had it as a sweet certainty at the bottom of her heart. But King? She, the woman, was stronger than the man. She, the woman, would have to surrender her strength, submit to see herself mastered by his weakness. In the splendour of her personality she instinctively rejoiced; and all her being rebelled against such a sacrifice of herself. Yet it would be so sweet, so splendid, to give it all up, to sink her personality beneath the dominion of his, to surrender for ever to his overmastering love! But she was the stronger; he, the man, could never be the master. And, with the woman's age-old craving, she passionately asked for a master.

They stood silent and motionless, each held together by a terror that John might find them there. But his step passed on. She drew herself quickly away from the boy.

He had no words left. He felt faint with the stress of his emotion. Mechanically he turned to his horse and put the saddle and bridle on. The antagonism of the girl seemed like a shield between him and her. He was dazed and blinded; he did not understand what it was that stood between them. He did not know how to attack it. He led his horse outside and mounted.

"Good-night, good-bye," she said, lifting her face to his. "Afterwards, perhaps, when we are older, when we understand ourselves—"

He saw her face faintly pale under the star-light, like a wet, newly-opened flower. Impulsively, despairingly, he stooped for her lips. She wrested her hand from him and fled.

There was only darkness about him now.

Next morning as he passed on his way to the

railway station, he looked back up the valley. High on the ridge was a girl on horseback. He caught the flash of waving white. On a sudden wild impulse he put his horse at the long slope and galloped towards that distant figure. The girl waved once and disappeared over the brow of the hill.

He had to ride hard to catch his train.

IX

AROHA GREY stood at the beginning of a new race; in King Southern an old race had almost reached its end. But for its transplanting it might, unnoticed, have trailed out of existence. He had been born in England, was seven years old when his parents brought him to New Zealand, and he grew up in this southern land with the blue haze of England yet about him. To him the bleak, bare, half-finished townships, set in the grim silence of the sombre, half-cleared bush, had in them no charm of the unknown future. He could not look ahead and see the sturdy cities rising swiftly up. The crude nakedness of the unstoried land appalled him. He missed the drowsy peace of the little village wherein he had played and wandered in his early childhood; he missed the little meadows set sparsely about with far-spreading trees; the winding, deep, narrow lanes, the banked hedges, the bare, delicately-etched trees against a grey, wintry sky, the wild flowers of spring that splashed the green sward with rainbow hues; most of all he missed the faint haze that hangs over England, the fairy haze that makes a dreamy distance out of a few meagre little paddocks and invests with a looming mystery a little spinney against the sky. He felt vaguely ill at ease—as if he was being spied on—in the illimitable, clear atmosphere of New Zealand, where nothing is ever far away.

It took him many years to make friends with the

sombre, silent, impenetrable bush; within its velvet darkness he looked to see the shadow-checkered glades of England, the old gnarled, crooked boles standing staunch and ancient in wide vistas of green-filtered sunlight. He sullenly hated the post-and-rail fences, the mathematical lines of the barbed wire. He wanted the wild, four-footed things of his remembered youth, that this strange land never knew. He could not learn to look for his flowers on the trees; and most of all he craved for the changes in the year, the unceasing miracles of the moving seasons.

When he first came to New Zealand he was but a weak, sickly boy; but the brisk air of Otago filled his lungs, the ozone of this wind-swept sea-land roused his blood. The keen, bracing climate of Dunedin, the sunny splendour of its winter of sharp frosts and snow, its nights of sparkling stars, even its days of persistent rain swept from the Antarctic on bitter winds, gave life a new meaning, a deeper colour, a vigour, an enthusiasm, a youth.

In that great pile of blue stone, faced with clean white Oamaru stone that fronts the city, high on the hills of Roslyn, King passed his schooldays. To a boy of this make school is not the happiest time. For his shy, self-contained temperament school held much that was unjust, tyrannical, terrible. He shrank from the healthy schoolboy confidences; he dreamed dreams. And at school there is football and cricket to play; it is the privilege and consolation of the old to dream dreams. King had the modern man's burden of a vivid imagination.

And the boy wondered over his aloofness from his fellows. He seemed to see himself set apart; he was of a different fibre. He began early to analyse himself. He found the work strangely interesting. You

must understand that he was no psychologist, no prodigy; he was merely a boy whose temperament had led him into the habit of brooding much upon himself.

For the rest, he was a likable, clever lad, a winner of prizes and a favourite with his masters.

During his school life a day came that was for him for ever memorable. On that day he made two discoveries. He found that he could love, and he found that he could paint.

He was walking home by himself from school. It was a crisp, bright, sparkling, winter day. The sun was brilliant and hard in a blue sky. The boy's way lay along "the Belt"—that broad band of native bush which encircles Dunedin like a ribbon of dark green and, with its swathe of cool shade and rich, sober-hued foliage, severs from the city the suburbs on the hills. Through the Belt broad curving carriage-drives wind, giving, through tall trees and giant tree-fern fronds, glimpses of the city on the flat beneath and the blue Pacific beyond.

As King turned from the road into one of these long-curving drives he was suddenly conscious of his utter solitude. He was shut in by high banks of red hematite, above which the dark green of the bush foliage towered hugely up. No human being was in sight. The city lay silent, unseen, far below. The road before him ran away under an avenue of trees. He might have been the only person in the world, the denizen of one of those drear ages of the past, before man emerged from the black night of the prehistoric. In all the universe there was no other soul.

Then a sudden sympathy with the bush crept upon him. The moist, pungent scent of decaying leaves, the perfume of dank moss and dripping ferns, took hold of him. The wall of foliage that shut him in,

the ice-hard, frosty road beneath him, the splendour of the perfect sky, the sense of buoyancy, of youth, of life pervading the day, gave to his heart a strange uplifting. He glimpsed some hint of a design, some meaning in life. It seemed to him that he understood. Nature, in a rare, unguarded moment, had lifted the veil, and shown him a picture of herself. And the revelation Nature had made was for himself alone. To no one else on earth had that revelation come. To him alone it had been given for one brief moment to penetrate behind, to see the deep heart of things. He had come suddenly into the sanctuary, and stood afraid.

Ah! if he could only show to the world what had been shown to him, if he could only put before the eyes of others the mysterious spirit of beauty that hovered over that scene, that hovered ever wistfully over life! And then he felt the artist in him stir. He could! He knew that he was the man. He had been shown this vision because by him the vision would be triumphantly given to the world. He could paint! He would work hard, work for a lifetime, but he knew that at the last he would put Nature upon canvas as it had never been shown before. He would. . . . And his thoughts roved vague and wonderful through the future. And his soul grew reverent. He was greatly blessed. Much had been given to him. It would be his ceaseless care to use his talent to the uttermost, to do all things to the glory of God.

And at that moment he saw that he was not alone. Round the sweep of the fern-edged drive came a schoolgirl walking. She was a demure little girl, with downcast eyes and a schoolbag which she loosely and carelessly swung. Reluctantly the boy resumed his walk.

They met at the dip of the road where a little trickle of water oozed across the path, making it a little ice-edged, muddy swamp where one had to go warily. King stood aside to let the girl pass. She did it daintily, but as she passed she lifted her head and looked shyly at him. The boy noticed, almost with a shock, the rich, undreamed-of grey of those demure eyes.

He felt vaguely annoyed. Girls had no right to intrude into these solitudes. They belonged to artists and their great stately thoughts. Girls were out of place in the bush—especially little schoolgirls with grey eyes. He walked quickly on. Before he turned the corner he looked back. The girl was standing squarely in the middle of the road, contemplating him with a steady, impassive scrutiny.

That evening he set to work in earnest to draw. He had always drawn; but this was to be serious. He would draw live things—no more dead white plaster casts and curved scrolls in books. To-night he was to do something greater, he would draw the bush, put for ever on paper the sense of solitude, the mystery of its purple shadows, as it had been given to him alone to see. The ecstasy of the artist was upon him; he felt the keen joy of expressing himself.

But he could effect nothing that night. Evidently there were rules, things that needed to be practised. Well, he would learn. He gave up the attempt, and almost without a conscious effort drew a picture of that little girl's demure face. It was the first time that he had been in love; he was thirteen.

It is easy to mock at calf-love. Yet to many natures it is a serious thing. Which man of us does not remember keenly his calf-love, the sudden terrible intensity of it, the glory, the miracle, the

wonder and the despair? What wife, happily married, does not sometimes recall, with a half smile —ah, yes, but with a dear foolish tenderness that makes the eyes suddenly smart—the first fatuous, impossible, stupendous romance of her schooldays? It is given to every man and woman in this existence to love utterly, only once. That is the first love of all—the sudden, absurd, divine wonder of calf-love. We get over our calf-loves, and afterwards we grow up and love again. But the love of the man and the woman is a calmer and a saner love. The calculating mind unwillingly intrudes into the emotions; the divine foolishness, the exquisite abandon of calf-love is no longer attainable. We are no more content with the impossible: we deliberately demand the possible with all its limitations, all its inevitable commonplace. It is only the boy and the girl who in their loves are abjectly impersonal.

For it matters not to the calf whether the loved one is hideous or beautiful. Frequently a difference of sex is not demanded. To the calf the momentous fact is its capacity for adoration, and, after all, that is the finest capacity that life has given us. The only people who retain it through life are poets—poets who do not marry, poets who die young. The grown lover demands too much; he takes things like age and beauty and attraction into consideration, sorts and sifts them, presumes to allow his heart to sit in judgment upon the one adored. The lover has his eye even for the absurd; cynics state that an incipient sense of humour, insufficiently curbed, disastrously affects the human birth-rate. But the young calf frolics in the region of the utterly impossible, and is wantonly joyous.

At church next Sunday, King, looking through his fingers when he was believed to be engaged in

silent prayer, saw a pair of grey eyes fixed benignly upon him. The church whirled dizzily before him. That was the greatest moment in his life. When he dared to look again in her direction he found the grey eyes eclipsed by slim fingers. She was immersed in her devotions, and King was adequately abashed. But as he ventured to glance at her again he saw the fingers slowly part, and felt those great eyes upon him. The rest of the service was tumult.

He found out whom she was. He used to wait for her on her way to school, and follow her casually at a discreet distance. Sometimes she rather deliberately loitered. But King had his careful eye on her, and cannily accommodated his pace to hers. No matter how she loitered, she never decreased the twenty-five yards that King judged sufficient to keep between them. It must have been somewhat worrying for her. Once audaciously she smiled at him. King's heart stopped with the tremulous glory of that moment. But he never ventured to speak to her, not even to smile in return. She was too sacred a thing to desecrate by good humour. He wanted nothing in this life but to go on loving her—at the usual discreet distance of twenty-five yards. When he passed her in the street—and the chances were given by the gods with such frequency that I suspect there was some surreptitious feminine stage-management somewhere—the shock of her presence to the boy was like a physical blow. He lived for months in a delicious ecstasy of hopes and fears, extravagant terrors, passionate dreams.

Her name was always in his thoughts. He was always forming it on his lips. It was a pretty name. Sometimes it came to his lips unconsciously. Years afterwards, when he was a grown man, in a moment of great stress his lips pronounced that forgotten

little girl's name. He wondered then whose name it was. His subliminal self was a more faithful lover than he.

At night he would make his way to her house for the perilous delight of haunting her neighbourhood, the deep joy of speculating which of all the windows of the house indicated the room in which she—though it seemed a sacrilege to suppose it—slept. For nights he would worship one window, tremble when a shadow swept across the blind, die when the light went out. Then a harassing doubt would assail him and he would transfer his worship to another window, his allegiance unshaken.

At last he met her at a children's party. They were blushingly introduced. King could not help a smile in his heart at the absolute unconsciousness of the hostess introducing them. She did not know the bond that united them. She did not guess at what a momentous epoch she was so calmly assisting.

"You're the little boy that stares so," his adored deigned to say with a delightful candour.

All the stupendous things he meant to say to her came in a jostling tumult through his brain. At last the realisation of his dreams! He stood helpless, unstrung by the vastness of his opportunity. Now he should tell her; and she would take his hand in hers—who knows?—perhaps put her arms round him and kiss him! Such things had been done; he had read of them, dreamed of them, and he knew.

Suddenly he became conscious that her eyes—cool, quiet eyes of grey—were calmly questioning his face. In her expression he fancied he discerned a tinge of displeasure. The world fell in ruins.

"Yes," he stammered, "I'm the little boy who—"

A little pout had ventured to nestle upon the little

girl's lips. They were nice red lips—and lips are good to kiss!

"Well?" she said imperiously, "Well?"

What could he say? He had so much to say, so much that was vital. He said nothing. She turned away in displeasure. He had seemed such a nice boy, with such a pretty face; and she had so wanted to know what made him stare so and follow her. But he must be a very stupid boy not to talk to her, not even to put his arm round her waist!

She turned away. Her great eyes of grey drooped upon another boy's face.

The stars rained from the skies. The universe sank into blank nothingness. King drearily wondered why he was still alive.

Then he looked up.

"Oh!" he said, "she's only a girl!"

Then he went and had supper. But there was a cold hand at his heart; his calf-love was dead.

X

DURING the year that followed King's meeting with Aroha he worked hard at his art. He went to the university, and did his utmost to interest himself in his legal studies. But his heart was elsewhere, and he gradually came to look on that little group of buildings nestling under the hill beside the noisy Leith as a prison-house. Within it were lectures to be attended, examinations to be passed; but once outside the ugly tin buildings of the mining school that prosaically guarded the gates of this modern temple of learning, a world of wonder and colour awaited him. On those solitary walks through the bush to and from his lectures King's mind was not busy with jurisprudence. He was imbibing the meaning and the fragrance of the world about him, probing and trying Nature with a keen lust for knowledge. For he had grown to see the beauty of the aspects of this new land; to him, as to every New Zealander, there seemed now something crude and harsh in the remembered staring yellow-green of the English meadows, something sickly and unreal in the first leaves of the English spring. He learned the exhilaration, the energising splendours of the clear New Zealand atmosphere. He felt as if he had stepped out of a fog—nay, as if he had come to the possession of a new sense. He perceived for the first time what space and distance in all their naked splendour meant.

He had petitioned his father for permission to attend art classes in Dunedin; but the Reverend J. Southern had his views on his son's future, and Art did not enter into his conceptions. So there had been a few icy words of irony from the keenly intellectual man of religion, and King had writhed, as he always did writhe, under the pitiless cleverness of this man. Against the sarcasms of his father King was not able to make a stand. It struck him as unfair—part of the universal unfairness of childhood—that his father should be able to beat his dreams down with such incisive and terrible logic. The father's point of view was right; but while King recognised this, his heart told him that sons also have a point of view. He was not old enough to understand that truth is a thing that eludes mathematical definition, and that to two differently-situated observers the same thing may have two, or a hundred, appearances, and that each of these points of view may be inexorably right.

So the Reverend J. Southern put art in its proper place, without the capital letter; and the boy, smarting under the scorn of his ideals, confessed himself unable to rebut his father's sarcasms, and retired into a sullen reserve. Henceforth his father must stay outside the door of his life. And his father seemed content. King knew that he would never give up art and that in the end his talent must win. And then his father would be compelled to acknowledge his mistake.

His mother, with only half her husband's understanding of their son, believed.

"Yes," she would say, "I know that you'll be a great artist some day. But wouldn't it be better just now to be a barrister? When you've got a good practice you could easily give up your spare time to

painting. In fact, I don't see why, when you're waiting for clients, you shouldn't take your easel and canvases down to your office and do a little painting in between whiles."

Yes, she was sure it would all turn out right in the end. For King was her own son; that was enough, surely! And then she would kiss him, with oh! such a profound belief in him, perhaps the more profound in that it was so mistily vague. And she would notice that his eyes had dark rings beneath them; he stayed up too late at night, drawing in his bedroom. He must be more careful. Oh, he must be an artist, since he was so set upon it; but it seemed so far off, and artists were such shabbily dressed people, and, meanwhile, there was his constitutional history examination ever getting nearer, and she was doubtful—King himself was doubtful—whether he would pass. He had been too much absorbed of late in a picture he was at, which he painted in his bedroom and kept hidden from his father's sight in the wardrobe. Every morning, as she tidied her son's room, she took out the canvas and studied it, without, however, arriving at any definite conclusion about it, save that it was a great and a glorious thing to be the mother of such a palpable genius. It was a big canvas, the outcome of many an early sketch. She wondered why he painted the bush—which everybody knew was all of one colour—a kind of dark, sombre, rich green,—as if it had all sorts of tints in it. He probably did it to make it look prettier; and certainly it did look much more beautiful.

So King steadily studied and painted, and consoled his heart with the knowledge that in the end he would come to his kingdom.

And of Aroha?

He told his mother nothing. Aroha was alone for him. Not even his mother's lips would have the privilege of mentioning her name. He was hotly in love with her—perhaps the more hotly because she had pushed him away. For he was only a boy—and I have known grown men who were as unreasonable. I daresay the gods find excuses for us all.

For a week after King's return to Dunedin he lived in Aroha's presence; his vivid imagination conjured up memories of her and went further and combined his remembrances in a thousand new impossible imaginings; he recalled suddenly with a shock certain words of hers, certain apparently unimportant gestures of hers that had lain unnoticed in his memory and now came to the surface with a new and insistent importance, demanding a new interpretation. He had her always with him; in the evenings he went long walks with her; he put her face into his painting and knew that she was looking over his shoulder as he worked; he set apart for thoughts of her the misty hours when he lay awake in bed and forbore to dismiss her memory by sleep, and he took her gratefully into his dreams. The thought of her was like an aroma about his life.

For the future he had no plans. It was enough that he loved Aroha, that he believed she loved him. She had not said so, but to the arrogance of youth nothing seemed more inevitable than that these two should love each other. He had to learn much of life yet, to understand that though love is given as freely as the flowers, it will not stay till it is won. He did not guess that there must be long service in love, that there must be denial and duty, that the knight in love must win his spurs. His love for Aroha was too swift, too easy, too inevitable for it to be of worth. Sometimes the gods give gifts, but

invariably they exact payment. So we learn the worth of things, so we understand the wondrous value of our heritage.

King did not know women, hence he did not know Aroha. It was necessary for him to learn. So the gods decided that he should learn to comprehend Aroha by a knowledge of other women. It is only by squandering his love again and again that a man learns its value. King had to serve his apprenticeship in love. And it was a long apprenticeship.

When King received a letter from Aroha—not a love-letter, but just a sweet, serious note, telling him she was well, wishing him well, saying—in a postscript—that she had not forgotten, King read a thousand fantastic impossible things into it, and was supremely exalted for days. He replied in a strain of superb foolishness, and was snubbed by Aroha's silence for three weeks. But he did not know—and, perhaps, it was well for him that he did not know—that that foolish, impetuous letter went about every day in the bodice of Aroha's dress and at night was kissed almost to shreds. And he did not know how many equally foolish, equally impossible letters she had written to him during those weeks of silence, and posted, with many pangs, in the kitchen fire.

After that interval he was more careful; he wrote letters that were quite unimpassioned, mere essays in friendship; but he left her frequent opportunities to read between the lines. Perhaps she did, but she did not tell him so. In one letter there was enclosed a note from Mrs Grey asking him to spend the next vacation at Westella station. The morning King got that letter jurisprudence seemed a thing of small worth, even "atmosphere" was a futile phantasy.

Aroha had made up her mind now—or rather her

heart had decided for her. She had relinquished the idea of decision. She loved King—that was enough. She felt herself undergoing some strange process of change that seemed to make another woman of her. Emotion overwhelmed her; her heart in a moment melted. There were times when she was but an embodied yearning. Aroha looked on with a kind of patient wonderment; she had become a strange, foolish girl, but she loved this new person who did such foolishly tender things. She gave herself up with a glad content to the sway of a passionate and dangerous tenderness.

So with a feverish zest she flung herself into the work of the household. It would help her over the time till he came. She saw in every letter of his how the boy was strengthening into the man. His love for her had changed him too. The weaknesses of which shamefacedly her heart — in the traitor hours of the wakeful night—suspected him, seemed to have died out of him in his new aspect of seriousness. He spoke less scornfully of his university work, more humbly of his art.

So Aroha saw him at Dunedin, qualifying himself for his life-work, proving himself by steady labour the fairy-prince of her dreams. And he was coming to Westella now—it was only three weeks. She refused to count the days by the big almanac over the kitchen wall: it made them seem to drag so slowly; but every night her heart made the reckoning for her, and she said with a great happiness, "In so many days . . ."

She would meet him at the top of the valley. He would come to meet her as he came before, up the long valley, out of the unknown into her dreams, swathed about with her imaginings, yet oh, so human and near! So she mused and worked,

serenely expectant, save when suddenly her utter need for his presence made her knees tremble beneath her and she swayed with a delicious sickness.

At last the day came. Though neither of them had mentioned the route, she knew he would come up the valley to the ridge, and she went there to wait him early in the afternoon. And, as before, she paused below the ridge among the tussocks and waited a moment in a delicious fear and expectation. Then she took her courage in her hands and ran to the top. And straining her eyes down the long sweep of valley she discerned nothing but the yellow sea of tussock land. It was too soon. So she stood waiting . . . and waiting.

And there was no change in the restless sea of silky yellow, except the slow passage across its surface of a mob of sheep, moving in long lines, like a fleet of grey sails afar, along the narrow sheep-tracks that ridged the slope. And at last when the late twilight had come, for it was December and the days were very long, she turned back slowly, wondering. There must be news at home: perhaps he had come by another road. She ran desperately down the slope. He was not at the homestead, and had sent no message. I believe she cried that night. Aroha did not often cry.

Two days afterwards, and they were long days, John, going into Pukerau railway station for stores, brought back a letter and a telegram for Aroha. The telegram had been lying there for three days, waiting the rare chance of a rider passing on the unfrequented road that led from the railway to Westella. The telegram and letter were from King. A great chance had come to him. A young and rising English artist, travelling in New Zealand

for his health, had decided to stay that summer in Dunedin, and intended to take pupils. It was too rare an opportunity for a student in this out-of-the-way country to miss. Of course he would not be able to come up to Westella this summer; he would avail himself of this wonderful piece of luck and stay in Dunedin and paint. He was sorry that he would not be able to see Aroha; but then there was his art!

And the girl sent him back a nice cheery letter full of good counsel, commending his decision and politely regretting that he was unable to pay his intended visit to Westella.

And when she had closed the envelope and saw John put it in his pocket before he mounted the dray, she felt that she had closed a door on her own life, that she had shut up something in her heart that would always stir and strive to escape. The scar of that wound would never heal. She had been maimed.

And when King received her letter, which was not the sort of letter he had expected, he wondered whether, after all, she really loved him.

But there was his art, and all that vacation he worked hard.

And Aroha, at the homestead, also worked hard.

XI

THERE were always King's letters to remind her that the door was not quite shut. He wrote earnestly, full of his new purpose in life, enthusiastic about the promise of his work. But to the girl, jealously scrutinising every unimportant sentence of his, came gradually a recognition of the fact that he had ceased to put her on a pedestal.

He regarded her as a friend, his best friend, to whom he ever turned when in doubt, of whose sympathy when in trouble he was sure. That foolish, impossible love that had glimmered through his first letters, the little, broken-off phrases that he had permitted himself and left unfinished because he knew that she would finish them in her heart, died gradually out of his pages. She could see herself fading in his eyes. She felt herself thrust back upon herself, shut out from his life. The door clanged sullenly back upon her heart.

And she resented this hotly. It lowered her opinion of him. And she was a woman, and was proud. She was a woman—and said nothing. Indeed, her love for King, flung back upon her, returned in a new guise. Her letters became almost motherly in their grave sympathy, their serene cheer. Already she had begun to look on King as a boy whom she had nurtured: she would watch over him always; she felt herself keenly responsible for him;

her heart went out to him with a great yearning that was nearer pity than love, and unconsciously she began to train herself to look forward to the time when he would go away out of her life, meet other faces, love someone else—when the door would shut tight for ever, and she would dwell in the stillness and the dark.

It was a drear time, and the discipline to a heart already sore and bruised was terribly severe. She parted from him daily, and in the long, slow nights the agonies were repeated. For her heart clung desperately to the memory of him, and each succeeding parting, each anticipation of the final severance, was as poignant as the last. So with suicidal hands she tore her heart and watched it bleed.

Then—almost inevitably it seemed to her—the end came. She got the letter from King that her heart had so long been vaguely expecting. She opened it hastily and, glancing through it, took it to read to her favourite haunt at the head of the valley. It seemed to cut her life in two. He was going away, to Sydney, and soon. He had had a quarrel with his father over his painting, and, stung to a white heat by his father's sarcasms, had blurted out all his hatred of his university studies, all his dreams of art. His father, who had long suspected the boy's inclinations, showed no surprise, and told King that he must now take his choice. He must decide once for all upon his life work. The Reverend Mr Southern would not stand in his son's way ; but if King decided to be an artist he must not expect his father to support him in a precarious profession of which his father disapproved. The boy's decision was immediate. He would give up everything at once and go to Sydney. His father said quietly that he had better take a month to decide ; at anyrate, he need not leave for

Sydney till he had had that time to think it over. So in a month's time he was leaving for Sydney—and fame.

Thus far she had hastily read as she walked up the valley. Now she was at the saddle, and she threw herself wearily among the tussocks to read on.

"Of course," the letter continued, "I won't be able to come up to Westella before I leave. But I shall write to you always, and it does not take long for the mails to reach Sydney. And you must always write to me. You are necessary to me, Aroha; I don't think you could ever guess how necessary you are to me. It is to you that I turn when I am in the blues—and I am often in the blues. But your letters are always so cheering, so healthy, that it often seems to me that your heart must be always laughing. In that tussock sea you are drowned in a happy peace, safe from all the evil and the sorrows of the world. I wonder if you are ever dissatisfied, disconsolate? Sometimes, though you never even hint of it, I fancy you must have your miserable moods; but I suppose yours is that optimistic nature that refuses to be swayed by moods, that always takes the best from life. Well, I would like to be you, safe in your circle of hills, secure from trouble and responsibility and despair. That tussock slope will always remain for me an oasis in my life; there I knew something of heaven, there I met you; and it is to that sanctuary of quiet that I would like to return at the end. Perhaps I shall, Aroha. And I know that when I do I shall find you there—high on the ridge, waiting. That is my dream, Aroha. Well, if it were not for this assurance of a great future that I feel within myself, I would like to be you. It is the unfailing

sunshine of your nature that I need. You have so much of it in your heart that I know that you have some to spare for your friend, KING."

Aroha turned the last page. There was no post-script. The blank page stared her cruelly in the face.

Then the hills seemed to close round Aroha, to hem her in in a rampart of silence for ever. She looked drearily at the horizon; that last ridge of hills against the grey sky seemed to menace her, to thrust her back. Here was her world: let her be content. Outside there were loves and hates, passions and regrets, and deeps of happiness and despair. But here for ever lay the smooth ocean of peace. The solitude was a benediction. The great few stars, slowly opening in the sky, seemed to her like the jewels of a vast silver altar. Was it for her to escape from this sanctuary into the welter of the world?

She thought, "He comes to me for comfort always. He asks me for a bare friendship, in which the woman is to spend all, the man nothing. He wants my love, and will return me its worth—in gratitude. Can he ignore the fact that I love him, that he has loved me? That has changed us both: our lives have merged. He cannot get away from that, and, ah, God! I know I cannot tear my heart apart from him. But he is a man; and men forget. They go away; they have so much to do, so many new interests to take up, such wider outlooks to view. They have their work, and it is always a new element in their lives; it does not hedge them about, cling to them as a woman's work does. It takes them far from themselves.

"But we women stay always. We see the same

thing over and over again; we do the same meaningless, futile tasks day after day; we go through the same damnably monotonous round of life from sunrise to set. And the things we have to do—the petty little house-tasks—so wrap themselves about our lives, that we can never lose ourselves; never for one clear sweet moment forget that we are alive, forget that we have been hurt. No; hour after hour the wound rankles; we cannot forget; we have too much time to remember in. And I shall have all my life—and I am so young—to remember in!

"Only, every day I shall continue to go through it all—but the difference now! There will be something lacking that will hurt cruelly and will not cease to throb. At every moment I shall miss something that was there once, that will never be there again. The man enters a new world, where nothing intrudes to remind him. . . . But we women do not change, do not escape from it all. Only, the sun won't shine again, and we twist a knife in our hearts by remembering how the sun once shone—that is the hell that we women make here for ourselves. Oh! he is wrong, unkind, callous to condemn me to this prison where I go round and round, day after day, in the drear company of my thoughts."

Then she went through it all again. She would have plenty of time to think it all out now. He had forgotten her.

Then she reproved her heart for its bitterness. She must make allowances; she must remember that he was very busy, very ambitious, very much troubled. No doubt he liked her best of all his girl-friends—and she divined that he would have many girl-friends. Perhaps she was something more. But already separation had eaten deeply into that love of his, and now he was going ever

further and further away! She contemplated that great stretch of sea space between New Zealand and Australia with a deep horror. Those endless leagues of the Pacific lay like a great array of dragons between her love and her. Separation was an implacable thing, more implacable than hate.

She recalled the few cases of love in absence that she had known. There was Janet Mackay, the eldest girl at Aorangi run. She had been utterly in love with Fred Beattie, the lawyer at Gore. Aroha remembered having to suffer much one night that Janet stayed at Westella, listening to Janet's enthusiasms over Fred Beattie. Janet ticked off his perfections categorically, and when Aroha had mentioned that she rather preferred his younger brother George, Janet had serenely unpicked George before her eyes, leaving a mere thing of disconsolate shreds. And Fred had gone to Westralia and left his legal business to George. The engagement was announced with great pomp before he left. As soon as he made his fortune at Coolgardie he was to return and crown his triumph by marrying Janet. He prospered much on the fields, and wrote frequently. But he was making too much money out of the boom to return just then. It was the chance of a lifetime, and he took it. And after years of waiting Janet married George, and did not invite Aroha to the wedding.

Then there was Mr Percival of Mataura, who had come to the colony because of a love affair. She remembered him — a keen, crisp, clean-shaven business man—and wondered where he concealed the sentiment of which he was suspected. He had loved a woman in England who had married another man. After her marriage there had been an interval of silence, and then she had written

him a letter of passionate regret. She had made the great mistake. He replied, and gradually a correspondence had grown up between the two, year after year, until at length the husband had died. Then Mr Percival had hurried to England to marry her. The great mistake was after a lifetime to be remedied. But he returned in four months, alone. She had seen him often since—a keen, crisp, clean-shaven business man.

No, she must make allowances for King. But to let him go without seeing him! Suddenly this drear expanse of tussock land took on a malevolent aspect; the hills seemed horribly near, they crushed in on her. Nature and she were antagonists. Her heart craved something more intimate, something infinitely more human. As she turned to go down to the homestead it seemed as if she was entering a valley of long despair.

Suddenly every muscle in her body grew tense with a stupendous hope. She stood stone.

"No!" she thought, "I'll not be passive under it all! We women are always too passive. No, it is mere cowardice, self-indulgence, a luxury of laziness common to womankind. It is so easy to drift, to be carried along by an irresistible fate, to slip from the too heavy burden of responsibility. It is a degrading thing—that entrancing luxury for submission that so fatally clings to us women. We shrink from action, initiative, will, and every time we timorously withdraw it seems to me that not only our individual souls shrivel, but that a part of the soul of the whole sex is irremediably atrophied. It is that that has made women such pitiable children in so many things where man is a master. No, I won't so easily submit. Not till I've tried, made my effort. I'll go down to Dunedin and see King!"

That evening, at tea, the girl's preoccupation prevented her doing more than make a pretence of eating. For now that she saw that she must go to Dunedin to regain King—and at her possible failure in that quest she did not dare to let her heart even glance—her purpose weakened. She saw how impossible it would be at the present time to leave the run. They were short-handed; it had been a trying year with snowstorms and heavy rains, wool was down, and ever dropping lower. And a difference of even a halfpenny in that fatal barometer of the London wool-sales meant, to half the run-holders in the Colony, the difference between prosperity and the mortgagees. No, she could not leave Westella.

She determined to write to King. It was to be such a different letter. In it she would lay bare her heart, shed, as it were, all the tears that had gathered in her eyes, let him see a woman desolate and disrobed of pride. She would cast aside all her woman's armoury of coquetry, throw herself upon his breast and put her lips against his. She wrote rapidly, almost frenziedly. Her mother, reading on the other side of the room, looked up often at her daughter with a keen pity that almost comprehended.

The letter was finished. The girl could not trust herself to re-read it. She rapidly enclosed it in an envelope and addressed it. Then with a sigh she put it down, and buried her face in her hands. She had taken a step that her sex cried out against; but her heart was happy. She pictured King reading the letter. Then a phrase of the letter recalled itself to her memory. Suddenly it struck her that it might convey a wrong impression to him, and it was most important that he should not mis-

understand. All her future was sealed within that envelope. If he did not read it aright!

She tore the envelope open again, and read the page. It seemed to her new mood chill and distant. And she had thought, as she wrote, that it thrilled with her passionate personality, was warm with the perilous nearness of her love. A cold hand seemed laid on the page. How was it possible ever to interpret herself to him? Oh, he should understand without a word, if he loved her!

And if he did not, after all? Then he would read her poor, piteous letter from a new standpoint—one that she had not considered. He would criticise, stand aloof, judge. She tore the letter to pieces, and swept them into the fireplace.

Her mother rose. "Aroha, child," she said, softly, her hand about the girl's neck, "I've been thinking you need a change. You've been working too hard. I think you ought to go away for a little while."

"Go away?" echoed the girl in a daze. "Where could I go?"

"Why not to Dunedin?"

To Dunedin! And King! She was one splendid thrill of joy, every nerve aflame. But she crushed her tumultuous hope.

"Oh, but I couldn't leave you, dear," she said.

Her mother took the girl's head on her breast. It was such a flushed, feverish forehead! The mother-heart melted in a flood of passionate tenderness. She looked into the wide eyes of her daughter with a sudden fear. The girl was ill; her heart was ill! She might die!

"Aroha, love," she said in that grave, deep voice of hers, "I am anxious about you. I'm frightened of keeping you shut up here so much. It is all different with me. I am old. Life has done all that it means

to do with me; but with you there is always that infinite promise. I must give you your chance. You must go away from this cramping place for a month or so. You must come back to me strong—strong."

The girl began to cry, softly and gratefully. It was so good to cry, to feel the touch of a mother against your cheek, to struggle no more. The mother did not check her sobs, but her strong arms were about her soothingly.

XII

THERE was another for whom the announcement of King's departure to Sydney had almost as much import as for Aroha. This was Charles Craven, law-student and poet. King had been at school with him, and at the university they took the same law classes. There was much in the two natures to fuse. Charles chafed at his studies as King did; Charles had ambitions as fierce as King's. And Charles was as assured of his ultimate success as King was. The two became intimates. His friend was the son of an up-country storekeeper in the "back-blocks" of Otago, a poor man who had no money to spare for the education of his precocious son. But he had been able to give him a certain amount of schooling in the public school of his township, and there the intellectual alertness of the gaunt, awkward boy had attracted the attention of his masters.

He entered for and easily gained a government scholarship to the Otago High School. Thither he had gone in his thick, clumsy boots, his country-cut clothes, his incredible ignorance of manners. But he possessed a more valuable thing than manners—a brain; and it did not take long for this country lout to learn the value of a good appearance, to acquire the superficial graces of good manners, to appreciate the worth of athletics, to enter enthusiastically into the discipline and good fellowship of

football. He finished a brilliant school course by becoming dux of his school and captain of the first fifteen. And schoolboy ambition can no further go. But what he prized above his other successes was the editorship of a certain absurdly impressive and high-toned school magazine which he kept alive with much earnestness and strenuousness for a few precarious issues. That had been his vindication to himself. In that periodical—now jealously treasured by a few "old boys"—for copies are as scarce as the first folio of Shakespeare — he had temeritously printed his first poems. It occurred to him at the time that life might hold further and greater triumphs; but his imagination was unable to conceive them. He had his fame already: a heaven seemed in the scheme of things absurdly superfluous.

Then he had carried off a scholarship to the Otago University, and there had decided to become a barrister. It was necessary to earn money—his brain saw the clear necessity of it, and law seemed the most direct path to its attainment. So he was to become a lawyer. But beneath that commonplace aim lay the real man—the poet. He was to get his living by his practice; but after ages would hail him as one of the great line of New Zealand masters of song, a worthy successor to Domett. With his brain he would earn a living; with his art he should earn immortality.

Already he had published some verses in the local papers, and he had had the unutterable joy of being accepted by the Sydney *Bulletin* — that strenuous, shrieking, self-appointed arbiter of all things Australian. Some day he would publish a book of verse—his first book of verse; for there were others to follow, till he had reared a reputation

firm and high. Already he was dissatisfied with Tennyson.

So at the university King and Charles came together and talked of fame. Each found in the other that stimulus he sometimes felt lacking in himself. Sometimes ambition would turn traitor and insinuate its grim doubts. It was through these moods of depression that each in turn helped the other. Art was their mistress, and they stood bound in comradeship by their fealty to her. They would mount the hill together; they would march abreast.

So when Charles Craven heard of his friend's stupendous decision, he rejoiced with a little envy of his friend. Not at his great luck in seeing Sydney, but at his splendid recklessness in putting his career to the test, in marching disdainfully in the open, toward the ramparts of the enemy. That, Craven reflected, he could never do. He had not the absolute confidence in his talent with which his friend was inspired. Craven was unable to conceive the possibility of himself ever burning his boats. He was to be a great poet, but he shrank from venturing far out into the great waters of life; for the present he would feel the earth beneath his feet. But he stood aside and admired King almost humbly. That was the splendid audacity that would win a world. King was going out a conqueror; he disdained to compromise with life. Charles sighed at his own inability so gloriously to burn his boats; but a vision of his place behind the counter in his father's up-country store recalled him to himself with a shudder. No; he could not risk failure; the penalty would be too terrible.

And King felt just a little contempt for his friend's caution. He wrote good poetry; but would he ever

succeed in winning the applause of a world? Not if he shut himself up in such an out-of-the-way hole as New Zealand. Why could Charles not take his fate as joyously in his own hands?

But the news that Aroha was coming to stay in Dunedin with her aunt drove all thought of his friend from him. He was sincerely glad. For already he was beginning to feel the heart-sickness of youth when, for the first time, it relinquishes the familiar. He looked at the city with a keen new interest, seeing it consciously for the first time. He was beginning to take greedy farewells of his little world, to store within him, vivid and bright and sharp, this little nestling city of the South. He must remember Dunedin always.

He wondered whether Aroha had changed much. She had grown staider, more earnest, less subject to petulances and depressions—all that was apparent in her letters. But he could not conceive a staid Aroha. And now this thing, fragrant of air and the solitude and the suaveness of the hills, was coming to a city. It seemed a desecration.

He went to meet her at the railway station on the evening of her arrival. As the train came in he looked unthinkingly at the first-class carriages, and did not see her. Then as he was turning away in disappointment, he heard her name pronounced. A fussy old woman in dingy black and a nid-nodding bonnet with jet spangles shivering on long antennae of black wire—she looked like a big, malicious beetle—was lavishing embraces upon a bewildered girl. It was Aroha. She had just descended from a second-class carriage, and stood helpless amid the wreckage of her parcels. Then she slipped from the arms of her aunt and cast a swift glance of expectancy along the platform. King was on the point

of stepping forward when a hand was laid on his arm. He looked impatiently round and recognised Caldecott, a third year's man at the university—a fellow of infinite undergraduate wit.

"Funny, isn't it?" he said. "She's prime dairy-fed, all right!"

For a moment King tried to blind his intuition. But he knew of whom Caldecott was speaking. Almost without knowing it, he muttered a "Yes," and looked at the girl again. It was Aroha; but such a different Aroha! First he noticed her dress; his eye could not escape noticing it. Her rough skirt did not hang, it flopped; her boots were thick-soled and squat, her blouse of varied hues and antique fashion, her hat polychromatically impossible. It was no spirit of the hills; it was merely an atrociously-dressed, rough country girl come to town.

Close by stood a girl who had just leisurely descended from a first-class compartment. In her dainty, cool, fashionable attire there lurked no evidences of travel; in her smooth face there was no sign of haste or flurry. She recognised King and Caldecott, and bowed. His mind leapt with damning swiftness to the contrast made by the fragrant neatness of this girl and the uncouth rusticity of Aroha.

"Just consigned from the back-blocks," remarked Caldecott, genially. "She ought to have come in the frozen meat trucks. But I say, King, she's not at all a bad-looking girl—good figure, too, if she only knew how to dress herself. Look at those eyes, man!"

There was one missing package that was not forthcoming, and the little tremulous woman in shiny black flourished her spangled antennae incessantly in the countenance of the porter. The girl stood

miserably by, helpless, awkward, abjectly conscious that she looked awkward.

King felt her flush of dismay within himself. His cheeks burned. He was ashamed of her helplessness, her rusticity, her lack of adaptation. Why had he made such a goddess of her? What a fool he had been! Was this the Aroha he had once deified?

He shrank back into the crowd. "Oh, come along!" he said miserably.

They moved away together. How could he meet Aroha with Caldecott's eyes upon him, how claim acquaintance with that foolishly flushing, rustic girl? Oh, how all his dreams had tumbled in on him! He felt infinitely sorry for himself. It would have been the joke of the university if Caldecott had observed his recognition of Aroha. He knew Caldecott's powers of making the most of an incident of that sort. He would be the most laughed-at man in the university.

Besides, he could easily see her to-morrow—if he wanted to—when no one would overlook them. No, he had been very wise not to divulge his acquaintance with the girl before Caldecott. And it would not have been fair to Aroha to expose her name to the possibility of banter. He could meet her to-morrow, and at the thought of her so close to him, her face recurred to his mind with a sudden vividness of perception. In spite of that awful dress, that impossible hat, she had grown wonderfully beautiful. It was not the beauty of a spirit; but the wondrous beauty of a woman who is loved.

As soon as he got home he wrote Aroha a letter, telling her he would meet her the following afternoon. She was staying at Caversham, and he appointed the end of the tram line as the meeting place.

After he had posted the letter an inconvenient doubt intruded. Had he not been a coward to disown her at the station? Was it fair to Aroha to turn away, to listen without a protest to Caldecott's sneers? He grew angry with himself, ashamed of his weakness. It would have been so easy at the station to shut his friend up with a word, step forward and claim the right to protect Aroha. Why had he not done it? He was sure that if the opportunity came again he would do it. But he reflected that opportunities do not come again. But who could have foreseen such a situation, or the necessity for such a decision? It was not fair of Fate. He felt himself miserably mean, a shuffling coward. And then insensibly his rage at himself transferred itself to the cause of his rage. It had all been Aroha's fault. Why could she not have had a little sense and dressed herself a little less outrageously? Why had she forced upon him the necessity for such a difficult decision? It was not fair of her. He felt dumbly enraged.

And then a new and more terrible doubt assailed him. Suppose she had noticed him at the station—suppose she had seen that he had been ashamed to recognise her? Would she not be hurt? It was meanly cruel of him to so affront her. And she was a girl that was sensitive to the least suggestion, a girl that craved with every nerve to be loved. It was cruel of him.

And if she had recognised him at the railway, she might refuse to see him to-morrow. She might be so wounded by his denial of her that she would not want to see him again, ever! That thought struck like a cold knife into his vanity. Had he fatally alienated her? At that suspicion he believed that nothing on earth would ever compensate him. He must see her again. And then that kind, soothing,

sweet friend of youth—vanity—came to his aid, and he felt assured that nothing so trivial as this little default of his would ever stand in the way of their friendship. She loved him too much to judge him so rudely. She must see him. And to-morrow he would explain, and she would forgive. He would tell her the whole truth to-morrow, and say how ashamed he was of his momentary cowardice, and their friendship would be cemented by his frankness and her inevitable forgiveness.

But no, there was no necessity for him to so affront her. She couldn't have seen him at the railway; he had kept well in the background. He would not worry her by mentioning it at all.

You see, he was very young—and it is so easy for youth to shirk things.

XIII

THEY met at Caversham at the tram terminus. As King alighted from the tram Aroha ran forward to meet him. She had been saying over and over to herself all the way that she would be restrained and commendably undemonstrative. He would never guess.

But at the sight of him—he had grown taller, but his face was too thin—at the sight of her fairy prince, all the hastily-erected barriers had gone to ruin, and she had taken his hand impulsively in both of hers.

Instinctively King glanced round to see if people were looking. Only for one moment, however; the next he was saying gladly, "Aroha! Aroha!"

He was sincere in his gladness now. He was but a boy, a dozen personalities fluid yet within him, each potentially himself, none ever stable. Keenly sensitive, swayed by his dissonant moods, he never knew in which of his selfs — the ambitious, the self-confident, the weak, the despairing, the impetuous, the sane, the gauche, the heroic—was embodied the real ego. Within his mind a flood of personalities succeeded each other in a bewildering riot of surprises. He was capable of much heroism, of many meannesses. Remember he was young.

They turned to walk together up the steep, hillside track. It zig-zagged up the gully between a lane of little houses that either perched high on the steep

bank above the road or peered quaintly up at it from the slope below. Above lay a little patch of native bush, dense and blue and cool. Below as they slowly mounted, lay the wide stretch of Caversham, overbuilt with small cottages, the ozone-swept East-End of this metropolis of the South, and further away a line of yellow sandhills edged the limitless blue sweep of the Pacific. From the beach the long rollers boomed with a muffled thunder. It was a dreamy afternoon in December, when all the land drowsed beneath the mellow heat of summer.

They talked little at first, shyly wondering over each other. King noticed with a glad surprise that the lack of taste, the glaring crudities of colour that had so smitten his eye at the station, were not noticeably apparent now. She was not well-dressed, but her dark green coat and skirt and her black hat infinitely became her. Here—in this lane—dress did not matter so much; she seemed at peace with her environment. And she was very beautiful. As they slowly sauntered he looked again and again at her with a new and growing delight. She had grown wondrously beautiful. Why had he not seen it at the railway station? Why had he not spoken to her then? Was he himself at all at the station? Last night had not some malign devil taken possession of him? What a fool he had been, and how near he had come to inflicting upon this dear friend a fatal hurt.

She asked him of his plans. He had much to tell, and was flushed with ambition and self-confidence. He would succeed—of that his soul was assured; but it would mean hard work, continuous study. He hoped to support himself by black-and-white in Sydney, perhaps he would even get some drawings accepted by the *Bulletin*. His father had given him

a little money, sufficient to keep him for six months; after that he would have to depend upon himself. His thought leapt quickly and easily past these drear realities; already he was a successful artist whose work was the wonder of Australia.

"And after that?" asked the girl. "After you've become a great artist in Sydney and people can't buy enough of your pictures, you'll come back?"

"Come back?" King was genuinely surprised. "What for? I've nothing to hold me to this country."

The brutal nakedness of the word hurt Aroha.

"Nothing?" she echoed drearily. Then with a brave laugh she said, "Why, isn't it New Zealand?"

But New Zealand meant nothing to him then. To her the name was like a mother's voice. He would have to go out into the world to learn how Maoriland called her banished sons to her.

"Sydney is only a halting place for me, on the road to Paris." He named the city with almost a reverence. "Paris! Why, how can anyone paint outside Paris and Rome? We have no atmosphere here in the South. We can only dimly dream of the glamour that broods over old cities. Everything is so new here, so bare, so barren of any beauty but the mere sharp, vivid beauty of its own. But think of Europe and her halo of association, her aureole of tradition! Here we see everything in its pitiless nakedness; it is beauty stripped nude. There is no haze over the colonies; how can we wonder or dream?

"Then think of the wonder of medieval cities, the gloom of grey cathedrals! The splendour of ruins, the beauty that hovers about everything that has grown old! And then England, with its green grass

and its lichened walls! And oh, Aroha! think of the stately, wide-spreading trees!"

"We've our own beautiful trees here," the girl broke in, keenly on the defensive. "Look at our rimus with their tassels of red, the big black-pines that are left when the bush is cleared, the green, green ngaio trees, the crooked, decrepit old broad-leafs, and the glistening, crinkly-leafed, chubby matipo, and—oh! hundreds more. And the white pine forests, with their tall thin trunks standing stiffly up row after row!"

"That is it," said King. "Our trees don't spread; they've no room for branches; they're too eagerly reaching up to the air to bother about spreading wide, too crowded by the other trees to elbow them out. I love those rows and rows of branchless pillars of pine and beech; a cathedral must be something like that, I often think."

"And our Tasmanian blue-gums," said the girl, "Aren't they beautiful? Look at that plantation against the hillside. How stately, how proudly they stand, ragged and thin and dark, glittering with the cold blue lustre of things of steel!"

"But they are eternally the same. Can you imagine, Aroha, a forest of thin, sooty-black twigs against a wintry sky? And all the changing dresses Nature gives the English trees? Oh, how I remember the sudden wonder of the English spring!"

The boy was leaning back against the fence. He had lost himself. The girl saw the artist in him, clear glowing in his handsome face. She loved him.

And she leaned closer to him, every fibre of her being yearning for his touch, passionately craving to communicate to him that thrill of adoration that went through her. Her hand fell lightly on his sleeve, and

her eyes watched him warily to see if he noticed the audacity. He did not stir.

"So you'll go away?" she said, "you'll always go away—further and further away? You'll never come back?"

In spite of her self-control Aroha felt that her question was almost an entreaty. The girl's voice tugged at some vague memory within King. He turned to her.

"Oh, when I've made a name, perhaps, I'll come back. But not from Sydney; to come back from there would be an acknowledgment of defeat. I couldn't risk that. I am not strong enough to admit failure. And to stay in New Zealand would be to give up all hope of ever becoming an artist. There is much to paint in New Zealand. I should like to return and paint it; but I should have to learn how to do it first, and I could never do that by remaining shut up in a forgotten place like New Zealand."

And as he spoke it came slowly to the girl's comprehension that in all his dreams she had no part. He had thrust her out of his life. He had forgotten that he had ever opened the door to her. But that was not the worst; she had been prepared for that; but he had shut her out of his future. He was to go alone—he and his art. And not for the first time in the world's history a keen pang of insensate jealousy for that soulless seducer of men's hearts—Art—entered a woman's breast. Was he to go away, serene with her triumphant rival, without a word?

"King," she said softly, "those were happy days among the hills!"

The girl's voice shook him. "Yes," he said, "happy times; but they're all over now. If I could go back again it would be impossible for us to

return to our old selves. We have both changed, grown other. Those two who met high on the ridge were two different selves; they don't exist, not even in ourselves, any longer; they are dead."

"No, no!" cried the girl, in a sudden fear, "they live!"

"Yes, they live, Aroha; but they've grown up, haven't they? They've grown matter-of-fact and prosaic and sane. No, Aroha, there are no more holidays for me. I've got my work to do. I must put everything else aside!"

He was fighting himself, he knew. Here was the turning-point. His art called him on, and ever on. And yet he could love Aroha, perhaps he loved her now. But he had thought it all out—it was all so easy to think out when she was away—and he had decided that he must put her out of his life. If he were chained to her, he would be chained to New Zealand. He would come back and end it all here, in this forgotten corner of the globe. No; he must set his face ahead, and close his heart.

So, many times in his solitude, he had said "Good-bye" to Aroha, had argued with himself with much cunning, and convinced himself that he did not care at all for her. He had told himself again and again that that dream on the hills did not count; it had been too wonderful to be true. He must forget; life demanded that of him. Dowered as he was with a great talent, it was his duty to throw aside the obstacles chance had put in his way. He must go unfettered. So in his heart he had said "Good-bye" to Aroha, had said it with an ease that was almost graceful. In fact, he had been a little discouraged to find how easy—in Aroha's absence—it had been to send her packing. He felt ashamed of his lack of fervour.

But the thing had to be done, and he did it thoroughly.

But now . . . . He turned to look at her. Fool! he had imagined he had thrust her away, and she was here, close, close to his heart! Nay, she was in his heart, part of himself. To push her away now would be to tear a jagged, bleeding rent in himself.

She was indeed very beautiful. His eye ran over her supple slimness with a sensuous artist-joy. She was so breathing with youth; her mere presence passionately called him. The sweep of limb and bosom filled him with a faintness of desire. In her dark eyes he saw a great exaltation of emotion. Her face challenged him. Sex called imperiously to sex. Here was no ethereal spirit of the hills; here was a woman mature.

She put her hand blindly out to him; he caught it in eager fingers. Her face was dangerously near.

"Oh, will you go away and—and end it all?" she said, almost with a sob. It was the first time that King had ever felt tears in a woman's voice. His fingers tightened on her hand.

"King, it was all so perfect, and now — now you will go away and leave us — leave me out of your life. King, I cannot bear to let you go!"

He drew her unresisting to him. He crushed her in his arms. He felt the world melt away. The blood hummed in his ears. He felt deafened, dazed within this stupendous whirlpool of emotions.

"Aroha!" he said, and as he spoke he knew he was casting away the future. He was drifting, drifting down some unseen stream, that would inevitably carry him into regions terrible and strange. But he recked not. It was enough to feel Aroha's heart throbbing against his breast, to see the splendour that shone in Aroha's eyes.

"Aroha, I love you!"

The words sang in the girl's incredulous heart. All the world was a pæan.

She lifted her enthralled, exultant face to his. He kissed her hungrily, till, with a sigh of utter content, she drew her face from his and laid her forehead upon his breast. He kissed her hair.

"And I love you," she said in a low voice, dwelling long on the dear words. She had said them over so often in her heart that she listened in a perilous ecstasy to their sound upon her lips. She felt like a novice profaning a shrine.

"I have loved you always," she breathed.

King was stirred by a keen sense of envy. He had not loved her—of that he was sure—until the revelation had come at her touch. But it was all different now; his career, his art . . . .

His arms relaxed. The girl almost shuddered, and looked swiftly up.

"Are you sorry you told me?" she laughed. "You have me now, and nothing—nothing you do or say—can take me from you! And yet—I can tell you now, I must tell you now, for you will understand—and yet, I have often wondered, dear love, whether you really did care for me — love me. I doubted you, oh, so often! And I was wrong all the time. Why, when I arrived last night at Dunedin, I looked for you at the station—"

"Yes, I know," put in King, hurriedly. "I couldn't get there in time to meet the train, because of my university classes."

The girl shrank back.

"Oh!" she said, and there was an utter despair in her voice, "I did hope you wouldn't say that! You *were* there! I saw you!"

The man released her silently from his arms. He

remembered how he had joined in Caldecott's sneer at her rusticity. And now—now he loved her! He loved this mere country-girl, meant to take her for his wife.

And then came a perverse vision—for this was one of those inevitable pauses of passion, the ebb of that great flood, and he plumbed undreamt-of depths. So came this perverse vision of the wife he had ever dreamed of—a woman of refinement, of exquisite taste, a delicate being whose personality was ever in tune with his changing moods, a being that was a harp swept by the winds of life, the fastidiously-chosen companion of his dreams, the divine consort of his art.

And his glance fell with a terrible naked directness upon the girl at his side. This was his choice; this was the woman whom he had woven into his life, the woof of which was his art. Her arms had fallen to her side with a helpless gesture, and he noticed her hands firm and strong, her sturdy finger-tips, so unlike the delicate tapering delicacy of his own. Oh, she would tie him down, come between him and his art! He was not meant to mate like this—perhaps not meant to mate at all. His art would brook no rival; his work called him on; he must fix his eyes ahead. This girl could never consent to take her rival's hand.

Aroha had moved away and was standing beneath one of the long row of blue-gums that stood like a regiment of ragged soldiers against the sky. He noted the tired grace of her pose. He moved toward her, and saw that her eyes did not see. She was looking out across the hillside, crying miserably.

In a moment he was all pity. His arms went round her. He had hurt her, oh, so wantonly!

But she shook herself from him.

"No," she said wearily, "you would not recognise me at the station. I told myself all last night that it was a mistake, that you hadn't seen me. And I cried for hours—and it is not often I cry. You were ashamed of me, King; you were ashamed of me."

King fell drearily back upon the truth. "Yes, that's it, I suppose. But now," he went on eagerly, "now it is all right, because I love you. Aroha, I love you."

"No," she said, and he noticed how she straightened herself. "I think you have made a mistake. I think we have both made a mistake. Love is not like that. Love is not ashamed. I don't think you do love me yet. Yes, you think you do, King, but I know—a woman always knows. I think we had better forget to-day, King. Let us drop it out of our lives. You could not have loved me if you were ashamed of me. And if you were ashamed of me yesterday, you will be again. For, King, I feel I am not worthy to be your wife; you are to be a great artist, and I—I could not help you in your life-task. I am only a woman; and dear, I love you too much to let you ever be ashamed of me. I would only hinder you. And —forgive me, dearest—I could not want to be beloved by a man who could deny me like that. I am very proud, King—every woman is very proud when a man speaks of love—and I want to be loved utterly. Any other kind of love I do not want. I think I am very fastidious in love. You have your work to think of, dear, and after that, perhaps, you will think of me. But I would even be jealous of your art. Is art such a great thing, after all? Is it of greater worth than a woman's love, King? I

want to be loved alone, just because I am I. Dear love, could you give me that sort of love?"

A new hope burned on her face. Then the light died out of her dark eyes. She had seen.

"I don't know," said the boy at last, worn out by the conflict. "I don't understand; I did not think love was like that. All I know is this, that I want you, dearest, in my arms. I want you for ever for my wife."

A great compassion stirred in the girl's breast for the boy who was yet in the struggle of life, who did not see clear, who did not comprehend the great thing called love. It seemed to her that when her heart became assured of her love for King she had come suddenly out of a dark tunnel; and about her, splendid and vivid, shone the eternal day. And he was still in the night! She said to herself softly, "And yet he could be ashamed of me!"

King stared miserably away. What could he do or say? He felt he must have time to think things out. He was in a whirlpool of conflicting desires, helpless. He moved to her and put his arm on her shoulder.

She smiled drearily and shook her head.

"*That* won't help, will it?" she said.

But the next moment she had flung herself into his arms, and was crying, crying. Her sobs seemed to King the most terrible sound he had ever heard. All the despair of hell was in them. He stroked her hair weakly. They clung together in a common helplessness, uncomprehending, blind—the man, too selfish to know the value of the great gift proffered him; the woman, so foolishly flinging so pure a love about a man so ignoble.

At last she drew herself away, her tears all spent.

"Come," she said gently, "it's getting late. We

must be going. Would you mind if I went back by myself? I have so many things to think out for myself. And afterwards—afterwards, I think we will forgive each other. But it is too hard to do that now. Good-bye, dear."

She held out her hand.

There was nothing for him to do but to take it.

They parted.

XIV

THE red-funnelled steamer turned west from Wellington Heads, breasting the ever-rough waters of Cook's Straits—that giant pathway of the great winds of the Pacific. The two days' journey up the coast of New Zealand had told King much of the beauties of the country he was leaving. From the ship's deck he had seen, far inland across plain and mountain range, Aorangi, "the cloud-piercer" as the Maori named it, standing sharply up in its mantle of everlasting snow, the queen of a galaxy of white-robed clustering rivals. He had passed the "notched Kaikouras" as they fronted the ocean edge—a seaward buttress of ice-swathed peaks, amethyst and purple with the glories of the dying day. Now the steamer ploughed into the night past the barren rocky peaked islets that strew the coasts of this rugged land. A few isolated lighthouses, perched high on steep, surf-worried cliffs, spoke but of their great loneliness amid the vast, unlighted deserts of ocean space.

The next day they had left New Zealand behind and were out in the open sea, but an officer called King's attention to a white cone, rising faintly from the sea far to the north. It was Egmont—that most symmetrical and beautiful of volcanic mountains, majestically sweeping up, ringed with forest and crowned with cloud, from a rich and verdant plain.

It is another Fujiyama, one of the lonely outposts of the superb mountain clusters of this rough country. Some day Egmont, with its crown of clouds, its throne of opulent plain and its halo of Maori legend, will be as famed as that sacred mountain of Japan.

Then Egmont sank into the haze, and followed four days of the Pacific — rough weather and misery.

During that drear experience King had time to contemplate the importance of the step he was taking. He had gone suddenly from the lives of his father and his mother; and he knew that parting was final. With the brief handshake that his father gave him, King felt that he was cast off. He had taken his way, and must fare alone. He knew as he said good-bye that he and his father would never meet again on the same footing; in the future they might make a truce, but Life would have to mould both materially before they could find a common meeting-place. He wondered whether the future had within it the possibilities that might bridge the differences between them. He did not think so; but he had forgotten the puissance of Death. What Life was unable to do her darker sister might in more majestic ways effect.

King's good-bye to his mother had been different. But he felt as he kissed her the last time—and he kissed her more than once—that he and she had parted years before. He had moved away from the shelter of her love; and she saw him depart for a vague land into which she could not put foot. The world called, and the mother's heart called; and the son heard but the voice of the world. He had his work to do, and he brushed aside, with the terrible practicality of youth, the yearnings of a mother's heart

that would impede that work. It was the ancient warfare between the generations. Youth must have its day though a mother weeps. So she had seen herself gradually shut out from his young life, conscious that it was but fair that she should so be shut out. The future was for him; she could only watch him set out. The mother had done her task; she could only impede him in his—even with her love. She recognised the necessity for her sacrifice; but her heart cried out at the cruelty of life.

So she knew that he must drift from her, accept other responsibilities, form other interests, lean no longer on herself. It was but part of the penalty of having a son, part of that long reparation that motherhood for its divine, special happiness must make. She had borne a son; whatever life exacted from her in payment for that great miracle, she knew that in the end she had triumphed over life. So in a vague way her heart was dimly comforted.

And at times, when she felt the handicap her desires were for him, she refrained some of her heart's overbrimming tenderness. So sometimes she was a little hard to him, a little unsympathetic, and King dumbly wondered over her unkindness. But not for long. Youth has its own interests, and is easily absorbed in itself. And she had no longer any interest in her own generation. It seemed to her that with the birth of her son all the vague tenderness that her heart held for that strong man, her husband, had fallen from him upon the helpless figure of their child. Henceforth she began life again. As she lay on that bed of birth she had silently registered a vow that she would begin life again, in order to keep her son company. But life forbade it. She had already lived; and youth lives but once. So she saw her footsteps unwillingly fail. She had already

lived her youth, and Life found out the cheat and punished her for it.

And already King, with the cruel lucidity of youth, had found out that there were realms in his life into which a mother could not hope to enter. He had mentally progressed far beyond her scope, and though the poets tell us fondly that a mother's love can compass all things, there are regions of the brain over which its passionate yearnings cannot claim dominion. In truth, King inherited his father's cold intellect, and it stood as a barrier to her yearnings. Her views upon art were hopelessly banal; and King, while carefully concealing from her how primitive she was in the realm of his ambitions, could not conceal from himself the same conviction. He could tell her all his dreams of art, and yet the certitude would not away from his mind that she did not comprehend. So he would kiss her and pet her; and she would be almost content.

So he said good-bye to his mother, and told her that in a few years he would come back a famous man. And she believed him, and as he got into the cab—for she could not accompany him to the railway station; she feared to disgrace her son by a scene on the platform—the thought struck her that perhaps this was the last time that she would ever see him in life, that she might die before he came back to her. And her heart passionately revolted against this ambition that was separating them.

Life was strenuously pressing the attack. She had no weapons to combat him with save her love, and King had somehow outgrown her love. She was no longer sufficient to him. And yet she had borne him.

But as King took the last look at that dear face,

the only thought in his heart was, "How happy I shall make her when I make my name, and come home a famous man!"

And during that long sea trip across the Pacific—that is so seldom pacific—King had time enough to see the inevitableness of his severance from his mother and his father. He was quite alone in life.

True, there was Charles Craven and Aroha. But he had passed Craven in the race; he felt himself older than his friend. They no longer stood on the same footing. King had put his future to the test, and felt the elation that comes from decision. Charles had compromised with content. King felt a little contempt for Charles and his caution, his lack of capacity for the splendidly reckless.

And Aroha? But he must put her for ever out of his life. She stood for happiness and home, for all the soft, slothful impediments to fame. Love was a thing that he must put out of his life. He had no room for it in his strenuous fight. Ambition would have no companion in the traces. It did not occur to him that in this decision he was selfish. If it had, he would have decided that a reasonable selfishness was part of the necessary equipment of an ambition. And it is unneccessary to mention that not once did he consider the point of view of Aroha.

At dawn, the fourth day out, the gaunt headlands of Port Jackson leapt from the sea. It was King's first sight of Sydney, and that to a New Zealander is like a first glimpse of heaven. Australia lay at his feet, this vaste, inchoate, unknown continent of his dreams, stretching away into what vague wilds, what mysterious, untrodden desert wastes! What would be the future of this wide, secretive solitude—

a Europe unpeopled, a blank map bare of history? He felt a great pride swell in his breast as he realised that this virgin continent, this gigantic island of the South, had been given into the hands of a sister race, that its only frontier was the inviolable sea, that from east to west, from tropic to Tasmania, was spoken one language—unsullied yet by dialect or accent, save the not unmusical drawl of this new people—and from sea coast to sea coast was but one ideal of government, one common tradition of liberty, one nascent nationhood.

And behind those grey headlands lay Sydney, the Mother City of the South, the Paris of Australia, the Venice of these Italian skies.

The steamer swept through the narrow entrance into the harbour. Sombre scrub thinly clothed the grey rocks of the headlands that ran like long narrow fingers into the quiet waters. In his ignorance of Australia King named this array of ragged gum-trees with their thin, metallic sheen of sombre-glistening foliage "scrub." It was so different to the thick, impenetrable, moist "bush" of his own land that he could not here dignify it with the name.

And the harbour, whose fame has reached across a world? A great quiet expanse of water, flecked with little white sails. It was Saturday afternoon, and the yachts and the "mosquito fleet" were out. Narrow bays ran everywhere audaciously into the land, and the ridges that rimmed the harbour's cup glittered brilliantly with the red roofs of thickly clustering villas, of wide verandahed bungalows. Beneath that cloudless Australian sky it seemed as if the hills were on fire.

In front of the steamer snorted fussy little ferry-boats, dodging with a terrier-like temerity beneath the big vessel's bows. The ferries were a blaze of

colour flecked by a still more vivid white. The people that made their decks like great bouquets of flowers were evidently an outdoor race, combating the stare of the sun with a garish brilliance of costume. The air sparkled ; colours struck the eye almost with the force of a blow.

Then the city rose up, spire after spire, out of its heavy pall of haze. Gaunt blocks of buildings rose from the water like the walls of a medieval fortress. Green gardens, splashed with tropical colours, reached to the harbour's edge. Terrace upon terrace, like long rows of stiff flowers in a formal garden, the houses rippled over the hills. About the narrow harbour, from little black wharf to little black wharf, the ferry steamers fussed, leaving a pattern of interlacing white wakes upon the deep blue of the waters. Slipping silently past the steamer came a tall, graceful schooner in the charge of a snub-nosed, worrying little tug. The grand sweep of Circular Quay was tenanted by a rank of gigantic liners, towering high over the wharves, seeming ludicrously stranded in the midst of that nest of buildings. And over all, deadening the horizon, lay the heavy blue pall of Australian heat.

The steamer crept up the harbour to the back door of the city, where the dirty, black, short wharves were that bred the plague. They seemed to the boy like the blackened, discoloured, broken teeth of a grim old hag. As the steamer made fast he noticed with a shock the pallor of the faces of even the lumpers on the wharf. Instead of the healthy bronze of the New Zealander, there was here a frailty of hue, a blanched pallor that seemed to belong rather to the scholar than to the navvy. But the Australian sun blazed overhead in a cloudless sky.

It was a new world into which King had so swiftly come—and oh, such a paintable world! Till now he had never understood the meaning of a city. To an inhabitant of age-old Europe this city of the South, scarcely more than a century old, must appear appallingly new and crude; but to King, who came from a country not half its age, Sydney was indeed the grey old city of his dreams.

The streets, the people, were familiar to him. He had seen the types so often pictured in the *Bulletin* that he recognised them as they passed. A larrikin, his trousers spreading over his high-heeled boots, his flat hat crushed over a long, ferret face, a black oiled tress hanging low over a weak, furrowed forehead, the mouth long, cruel, loose with frequent expectorations, the gaunt figure, slouching and inert, leaning against a post under a wide verandah, was engaged in a monotonous, toneless conversation with his "donah."

She, too, was already known to King. She was pretty with the bold prettiness that knows all things and wants to know more. Her cheeks were of a pallid beauty that suggested the delicate bloom of a peach. From her clear, pale skin, dark eyes, sunk in the cheek, looked boldly out, hard with the knowledge of life. Her lips were vivid in the colourless face. She was only sixteen, but looked twenty-one. In this land youth matures quickly. She was dressed in white, and on her head blossomed a garden of roses.

He contrasted this type with the girls of his own land. He recalled their stalwart charm, the healthy red of lips and cheek, the freedom and spring of their stride, the robust grace of their bosoms. He wondered at the difference in type.

If climate and environment had done so much in a century, what might they not effect in another hundred years? He looked at this too swift efflorescence of sex, and like a breath of coolness came the sudden memory of Aroha.

XV

AFTER a day at the huge Hôtel Metropole, King moved to the address of a boarding-house in Darlinghurst. It stood high on a ridge, one of a long, balconied terrace. From his diminutive room on the fourth floor he could see, across the reefs of terraces running down the spurs to the harbour, the spires and domes of the city against the sky, and beyond, the sweep of the harbour crowned by the heights of North Shore.

The street hummed always with life and movement. To King, accustomed to the privacy of his little Maoriland city, this incessant stir of life was at first disconcerting. But soon he felt himself one of the crowd that for ever eddied and surged along the high-walled streets. They were all of his kind, all at work; and though his work lay on a higher plane, yet he had no doubt that to each his little task was equally important. He looked at them aloof; yet a feeling of brotherhood was stirring within him at this sudden descent into the realm of such wide and splendid possibilities.

In the warm evenings—and nearly all the evenings were warm—the people opened their windows and crowded eagerly out on to the wide balconies. There was a faint throbbing of pianos, singers' voices broke across the heavy hum of the restless city, a band of street musicians played far down the street, the distance tuning their strident tones into a vague har-

mony. In the little cool gardens in front of the houses the flowers looked gladly up into the cool rain of the watering-hose. There was an air of reviving, of wakening everywhere. It seemed as if the city were drawing deep breaths. In the street men in light suits and straw hats sauntered slowly past, smoking cigarettes; women in evening-dress, with bare heads and white, uncovered shoulders gleaming vaguely where a silk scarf had been impatiently pushed back, passed on their way to the tram for the theatres. Girls and men, two and two, strolled not on earth, haloed in illusions. . . . And over all was the dull glow of the city, over all the long, unwearied roar of the distant traffic, over all the heavy, close heat and the lassitude of the Australian night.

It was a new world to King. During that first enchanted week in Sydney he thought that he had strayed into Paradise. The people were so inexplicably, so irresistibly happy, so feverishly joyous, so laughter-loving, so enamoured of the open air. He loved to go to the city in the afternoons and move slowly with the sauntering, listless crowd down the wide-verandahed, crooked, sun-stricken streets, or turn as into an enchanted realm into the strangely unreal shelter of the arcades, that all day gleamed with the cold whiteness of the staring electric lights. He moved slowly, having learnt that his quick stride, engendered of a climate that is always brusque, was unsafe in the sweltering heat.

He noted the listlessness of the men, the furrow of weariness upon their foreheads, their tallness and their pallor, the slight stoop of their shoulders, the slouching walk. He listened to the long drawl of their talk, the sense that underlay it of oldness, of weariness, of dislike to effort. And he had an instant's vision of the future of this new, untried race.

He saw its intense self-consciousness, its sensitively irritable skin, its arrogant belief in its destiny. He saw its strength of vigour, its lack of reserve. And despite the pathetic effort this race made to retain the memories of its starting-point in another hemisphere—its retention of the frock-hat of a colder civilisation in this semi-tropical heat, the poor, pitiable attempts to graft upon an out-door people the customs and conventions of a race that loved its warm hearth, its limpet-clinging to a Christmas-tide that in the wreck of the seasons arrived in the middle of a sweltering summer, its surviving passion for the literature of a country now alien to it—despite these secretions of a forgotten past, this race was beginning to stand up and know itself as unique.

This so strangely un-British temperament, that had no respect for precedent, that had forgotten the word "humility," that loved the sun and fretted within the confines of the home, he saw was due to the sudden and utter change in the race's environment. Here was a British race that after centuries beneath a gloomy sky had been suddenly emancipated to an atmosphere of sunlight, that after centuries of respect for, and oppression by, precedent and the past, had been suddenly given the broad untrammelled future, that after centuries of imprisonment in a little island-group—geographically a mere appendage of a continent swarming with diverse and contending races—had been suddenly granted the wondrous heritage of a continent lone and unpeopled. The exhilaration of freedom, sun, space, sang in their hearts with a delirious joy. The race was heady with its dazzling possibilities. It scarcely knew what to do first; it tried to do everything.

But behind that lack of reserve that so contradicted

the British stock from which they had sprung, there was another lack that seemed more serious — a slackening of the fibres of national dignity, a lazy dependence, an easy relinquishing of responsibility. And here he wondered whether that carelessness about the future, that liability of the Australian to gamble upon his hopes, was not due to the indeterminate position in which as a nation he found himself. Practically, he belonged to an independent republic, yet acknowledged himself a subject of a monarch whom he had never seen, who kept his close-guarded state in one small and distant group of islands at the other end of the world. And though an independent nation, he allowed another nation to guard his shores, feeling that he amply repaid that nation by the mere fact of his allegiance. King could see one way out of this slackening of the moral responsibility; and it lay in the recognition on the part of Australia that she was an independent nation, in the gradual emergence of this wide continent from its swaddling bands, in the proclamation of its separate entity as a nation. It would have to show that it was worthy of its nationhood, that it could uphold its dignity, that it could stand alone. Then in the minds of that nation would grow and mightily develop that final pride of race, that supreme dignity of nationhood.

And this glad sense of youth and vigour inherent in the race had not been gained without corresponding loss. The semi-tropic sun had his penalty to exact. The Australian of the future would be capable of gigantic spasms of energy, of heroic feverfits of creation, of swift and impulsive national sacrifices, of orgies of selfishness and of renunciation. But the ebb would come, the blood would cool.

Yet what high splendours of art, of literature, of

patriotism, would arise from those swift fevers of national consciousness, of national aspirations and national stresses! Australia would inevitably have her Elizabethan age—but how much wider an age, how much more virile and passionate would be the brief, dazzling culmination of the empire of the South!

But perhaps the women aroused his wonder more than the men. They seemed to him exotics. They had the tropics in their pale faces, their dark, languorous eyes, their quick, sensuous blood. He noted the rich, full lips of passion, the full curve of the bust, the slim, tall figure of litheness, and he condoned the instinct that compelled them to set off the delicate pallid bloom of their skins by a blaze of colour in their dress.

Every afternoon these women of the South drifted up and down the narrow, teeming streets, clustering like flies about the big shop windows, trooping in their hundreds into the crowded, sweltering tea-shops where they languidly gossiped and ate ices.

Or, on an evening, King would go down to Circular Quay and take the Manly ferry steamer. Innumerable girls in white with masses of flowers on their hats, multitudes of young men, white-trousered, straw-hatted, trooped on board; the double screws revolved, and the big boat in the midst of a little flotilla of smaller ferry-boats set out from its wharf. Then at the end of this inner harbour where the big ocean liners were lying in the heart of the city the ferry boats would turn to wider courses, their wakes lying on the water like the white rays of a fan. Then as the big steamer moved swiftly toward the harbour mouth the panting people on board would lie back and breathe reviving draughts of the ocean air.

King wrote wonderful letters to his mother in those days, letters full of exultation at his escape from the narrow isolation of New Zealand, throbbing with hope and expectation. There was stimulus in the air; this fervid city of the South thrilled with art, was alive with emotional nerves. Life flooded through him in a rich fervour that half intoxicated him. His blood stirred in a fever of eagerness and enthusiasm. All the things in the world were possible and near.

King's first practical step for the furtherance of his ambition was to join an art-school. He had been recommended to attach himself to the classes of Edward Struve, a genial, middle-aged artist who had no ideals and lived up to them. This artist was a master of technique, a worker who had unsuccessfully flirted with his imagination and fallen back upon the prosaic with a satisfying sense of security. He painted what he saw, though fastidious critics accused him of a tendency towards untruth. Though he was not a successful artist, nor even a good one, he had the faculty of teaching. He knew what should be done, and triumphantly told others to do it.

But, somewhat to his surprise, his pupils did not stop at the limits of his tuition; they had ideas. So somewhat unexpectedly he found his studio the nest for a thriving and noisy school of youthful impressionists.

Australia is a land of sombre beauty, of wide spaces in monotonous tone, of broad shadows, of low colour and sharp contrasts. The hard brilliance of the staring sun in an unfretted sky flattens every tint. The sombreness of the foliage, the vast spaces of sunlight, the lack of shade, make Australia a land unpaintable according to the traditions of an old-

world art. The green of grass, the delicate broidery of the spring, the rich garments of the autumn, the chequered beauty of a windy sky, the varying emotions of an English April, the witchery of the English haze are lacking in this harder, more brilliant, sun-smitten continent. It is too serene, too unchangeable, too vast.

So to paint Australia the artist must be an impressionist. He finds a beauty, ragged and picturesque, in the hard, metallic, glistening foliage of the gum-tree, in the buoyant delicacy of its thinly clothed branches. He learns to look for broad effects, the wide sweeps of the brush that Nature has grandly made. The delicate daintiness of rural England, veiled like a young bride in her blue mist, is unknown and inconceivable under the sparkling brilliance of the aggressively blue Australian sky.

So a school of young Australian artists had unconsciously arisen with the intention of painting Australia in the only way it could be painted. To English eyes this vivid treatment of a vivid landscape might seem crude, unfinished. But Australian eyes saw in the efforts of these Australian artists a panorama that was familiar to them, and Australian patrons bought those pictures. Unfortunately, in a land where art in everyone is instinctive, where human song-birds rise from every back-blocks township, there were ten artists to every patron. Australia has a rough way of evening matters by driving its best artists to England, where the leaven is happily wanted.

So Edward Struve viewed with a cheerful tolerance the break-away in art traditions that his most brilliant pupils made, and, learning that the public and the National Gallery Trustees bought these

impressionist canvases, he tentatively broadened his own work and found himself hailed as the leader of the little school.

It was among this band that King found himself. These students had all the temerity and audacity of youth in a new land foreign to the idea of tradition. Australia has no galleries of old masters to terrify and bewilder the aspiring student by their flawless supremacy, their despairingly aloof perfection. The Australian youth does not know the reach, the width of the art of the past. The summit of perfection seems to him easily attainable—and he is young and can climb! It is only when he stands before a dozen different supremacies of art, crowded into some small room in a gallery in Florence, Rome, Paris, London, that he wonders vaguely at his presumption and takes to black and white. But in Australia, unhampered by precedent, undeterred by tradition, the Australian artist, fronted by a new, unpainted world, determined with the cheery heart of aggressive youth to paint it in his own way, as it seemed good to him. Sometimes he succeeded.

King had a certain quickness of conception, an aptitude of grasp that soon put him on a level with the best students in the class. His energy, and the swift ease with which he absorbed hints and processes that usually demanded a dreary and painstaking apprenticeship, were to his fellows and to his master remarkable. He found at the outset, between himself and his Australian competitors, an enormous difference in capacity for work and capability for keeping at work. The abiding influence of a temperate climate carried him through the rigours of this semi-tropical one. It was not long before his work began to show signs of distinction. At the end of six months he had acquired recognition as a student who

did the daring thing in art, and sometimes did it well. Edward Struve liked the suggestiveness, the hint of audacity in the New Zealander's work, and put King down as clever—perhaps too clever to be a genius. He had the capacity in art that in university life is known as a genius for passing examinations. He made every use of his knowledge ; he never wasted himself, he never dared to make a splendid failure. There was a quality of success, a note of brilliant hardness in every stroke of his facile brush. King's work was always arresting, even if it were not always true. His personality was signed on every sketch. He was immediate, impetuous. Perhaps I can sum up his position at this stage by saying that his originality carried him further than it would have carried a more conscientious student.

But after six months in Sydney, during which King was like a lover infatuated with his art, a cold shock suddenly awakened him. He found that nearly all his money was gone. He had not been able to find an opening for black and white in Sidney. True, he had seen some of his drawings appear (greatly reduced) in the *Bulletin*, but an income from such a source was impossible. So at the end of six months he found himself face to face with a serious problem.

CHAPTER XVI

An authority on etiquette has said that the society one meets at a boarding-house is as select as that which one would meet on a raft after a shipwreck; and the boarding-house where King had his home was no exception to this rule. The group of individualities that gathered daily round the dinner-table interested King not at all. He felt that the mere fortuitous presence of other people in the same lodgings as himself was not a matter that affected him save for the necessity of occasionally saying "Good-morning" and sometimes passing the toast. He believed that he chose his friends; he was not old enough to know that all one can do on this earth is to make a choice from the poor selection of personalities that come within the average individual's ken. He revolted from the thought that a mere chance meeting should force his hand. You see he walked still on stilts.

There was the landlady's eldest daughter who poured out the tea. King had taken her into his consciousness only to the extent of asking her for two lumps and less milk, and to mentally remark that she was rather ugly. She had wide, unemotional eyes, and a nose of a hue that on chilly days protested too much. But one evening, a few months after his arrival, she had confided in him—with many tremors and a virginal shyness—that she who spoke painted too. She would never dare show her efforts

to a real artist; but in the talk that followed it came clearly to King that this quite uninteresting woman had with the artist the same hopes, the same keen despairs, the same miracles of exaltation in the execution of her weak and smudgy sketches. Her soul yearned after its ideal; and in the blatant water-lilies and stiff bulrushes with which she so unnecessarily covered plush-framed mirrors there seemed to her some dim goal to strive for, some artistic instinct to appease. So blindly, yet with the same travail of soul, she worked towards her trivial ideal. Untrained, unfed, her ego had aspirations towards art; she wondered dazedly over the great pictures in the National Gallery, and took to her heart the worst and most accessible of them. They were the goal towards which she incessantly strove, and which was ever divinely inaccessible. So, in that blunted, clouded soul of hers, shut out from the brilliance that fell on the more favoured, she yearned and wondered and despaired, even as King did. And thenceforth the boy came into the presence of the plain, elderly girl with a vague understanding, and in his heart a dim pity.

Then there were the Tatlows—two old persons vaguely understood to be interested in the coal trade. The old man tended towards the didactic at breakfast; the old lady sniffed. King retreated behind his propped-up *Daily Telegraph*.

And there was the Anæmic Niece. King had so christened Miss Jennie Wave, the pale little girl with the face of pain and the great dark eyes. She was an invalid, and disappeared into her room for days. She was in the care of her aunt, Miss Lavinia Wave, a quiet, young old-maid who had not yet given up hope, and shyly and with many misgivings refused to go into bonnets. The niece was not yet twenty,

and half her little life had been spent on a sick bed—on the rack of frayed nerves. She had been brought down from an up-country township in New South Wales to consult a celebrated Sydney nerve specialist. To King nerves meant schoolgirl hysteria, and he had the man's contempt for the woman's failing. To him it seemed monstrous—when he deigned to consider the matter of the Anæmic Niece at all—that the girl did not make some efforts to combat her weakness. He ended by dismissing both niece and aunt from his consciousness.

But one evening he spoke to the girl—they had been left alone in the drawing-room — and in a moment a torrent of confession was upon him. Sydney—so marvellous after the stagnation of her little back-blocks township — represented to her splendour, happiness, the proud, full stream of life. And here was a personality cramped in a broken body that yearned fiercely for all that life held, for all that for ever life withheld. She demanded enjoyment, passion, love. Her strenuous brain would over-leap the confines her ailing frame had fixed. It was a revolutionist in an invalid's body. To her the *Bulletin*—crude, strenuous, acrid—was a bible. On that bitter food she had been nurtured, and in her burned the fierce, uncontrollable, passionate Australian spirit. She was discontent shut in upon itself. She saw, with a pitiable clearness that resolutely cast aside every illusion, herself denied her sex's inalienable right, and she had not learnt—possibly would never learn—humility and patience. She snatched impatiently at the hands of Life, and found them closed against her puny fingers.

So, shut from the world her mind demanded, Jennie Wave built up a universe of her own from the printed word. She read everything, took with a

voracious appetite the best and the worst that literature had to offer, and in this malleable world of her imagination was somewhat content. She loved with the fierce impetus of Gertrude Atherton's heroines—those women of the red corpuscles!—she travailed with Tess, she lived with the breathless intensity of the *Bulletin* story heroines, stripped naked of all but sex.

All this came from the wrought-up brain of the weak girl in a torrent of confession. She had found a confidant, and recklessly gave her feelings vent. King shrank from the confession almost with horror, yet with a keen pity in his heart. To him, with his art, so much had been given; to her so much denied. Life was not fair. If ever his art were taken from him, if ever he lost confidence in himself to do the one thing he believed he had been sent into the world to accomplish, would he accept his fate with less tranquillity? He shrank from picturing the possibility.

Then there was Miss Barbara Smith. She was not young, possibly thirty-five, a pale-faced, little woman with indeterminate eyebrows and muddy hair which she dragged viciously back from a nice forehead. It was some weeks before King's consciousness took notice of her at all, though every day she was in her place opposite him at table. She came into the room in the morning so quietly that King's first sign of her presence was her mousey little whispered "Good-morning!" Then her eyes would droop upon the toast-rack and King would relapse into the cables. She was annoyingly precise, going out every morning with an exasperating punctuality to some office in the city. Later, King learnt that she was a retoucher at a photographic establishment in George Street. He decided that he

liked her eyes; they were quiet, sensible eyes. Her glance was almost like the touch of a cool hand. So unlike the impatient, dark eyes in the drawn face of the Anæmic Niece.

One day, a few months after his arrival, King fell ill. Influenza held him in bed. That afternoon the news filtered through the house. As King restlessly tossed through the sweltering heat of the long day a knock came to his bedroom door. It was the elder Miss Wave with some books from the Anæmic Niece. She told him that her niece had one of her headaches. And the fevered boy seemed to suddenly comprehend something of the girl's position.

That evening also appeared Mrs Tatlow, the old lady vaguely connected with the coal trade. She brought some jelly that she had made with her own hands, and she hoped that Mr Southern would pardon her the liberty (sniff) she had took in offering it to him. She had had the influenza herself last summer; she was that bad that she thought she was going to die (sniff) and there was nothing she could eat but jelly, and really you could buy the packets so easily nowadays it was no trouble at all to make it (sniff); not that she believed that it was really as nourishing as the jelly she used to make out of real calves' feet (sniff); there was something really nutritious in that jelly; now, if Mr Southern would only try a little of this (sniff) and pardon the liberty she had took in bringing it up to him, she felt sure he would feel better, cooled-like (sniff); now she must go and attend to Mr Tatlow (sniff), he was always that particular about his supper, being old-like and got into habits and that-like, and he wasn't so good at getting about now as he once was (sniff). Ah, well, they all got older and, thank God! they both could grow older together (a very sniffy sniff); there now,

she heard him moving about below, and if he didn't have his supper at half-past nine precise, he got that ill-tempered that there was no putting up with—

With a sniff concluding she went.

The next day she came again with more jelly, and that evening he heard the same timid knock at the door. In fact, so hesitant was it that he was not sure anyone had knocked, and only on its being repeated did he call "Come in!"

Miss Barbara Smith appeared.

"They tell me that you've got influenza," she began hurriedly, as if repeating a lesson. She was evidently perturbed at her presumption.

"I thought I'd just come up and see how you were getting on," she added, when she had recovered her breath. "A man's never able to make himself comfortable when he's ill. He never seems to grow into a room as a woman does into hers. Now a girl couldn't sleep a night in a strange room without making its four bare walls reflect her personality; and a man might live a year in a room and never leave a mark to show that it was his."

She was talking easily now. King was surprised to notice how bright her face was, how brilliant was the light in her neutral-tinted eyes. She was moving about the room, quietly putting his clothes in order, freshening the room with a woman's touch.

"Yes, I'm afraid my room's rather untidy," admitted King. "It always is."

"Not more untidy than most men's," she said.

King stared. "How many men's bedrooms have you been inside?" he laughed.

She answered with a quiet seriousness. "Oh, men are always getting ill. They take to their beds so easily. I daresay it's because we women are, as it were, always on the edge of ailing. We live

accustomed to the thought of sickness. Illness, and the thought of illness, to us is almost a commonplace; but to a man illness is an extraordinary, a fearful thing. If a man feels the least bit unwell, he gets scared and slinks away to bed. There was Mr Graham who had this room before you; he used to have a girl's photo on the dressing-table just where you've got that photo."

She pointed to a little primitive portrait of Aroha.

"Only Mr Graham's young lady was more good-looking—at least, more *men's* good-looking—than yours. She was an actress, I think. Well, he used to be always getting colds and lying up, and when I came back from town I used often to run up and see how he was. He was usually pretty irritable, but then, you see, he was ill. At first, I thought it was perhaps because she did not come to see him, and once I asked him; but he laughed and said she wasn't that sort. So I used to bring him up flowers for his room. I've got some in my room if you'd let me put them in here—they would brighten the room. Mr Graham used to put up with my fussing for the sake of the flowers, I think. Besides, I like men to talk to; and they don't talk to me very much, you see. But when they're ill I *make* them. It's an unfair advantage to take, of course; but men are so much more sensible to talk to; they're not so mean and petty. Of course they are coarse and horribly tactless; but when they're ill the roughness is softened out of them and they're quite bearable. I think if I ever married I'd like a husband who was always ill. Do let me get you those flowers—they're country flowers, not the sick things you buy in the streets."

"So you're a country girl?" he said. He was feeling vaguely annoyed at the way in which Miss

Smith regarded him. He was merely the occupant of a bedroom in which Miss Smith took an interest.

"Yes," she said, as she arranged his pillows for him. "The farm at Penrith wouldn't support us all, so I had to come to Sydney to make a living for myself."

"And you're in a photographer's shop, aren't you?" King was beginning to feel a faint interest in this little mousey woman with the patient eyes.

"Yes, I am a retoucher. It's easy work, though sometimes it's a bit dreary."

"But retouching?" King wondered. "Isn't it dreadfully monotonous work?"

"Isn't all work monotonous?" she returned, with a touch of fire that in her seemed to King almost ludicrous.

"Not my work!" he preened.

"Oh, you paint!" she said indifferently. "I suppose you can afford to paint; but I wish—I wish—" She hesitated. "I wish you would go in for regular work, some real work. I am sure it would be better for you."

King gasped. "But don't you know that painting is my real work, my life work?" he managed to say at last. Miss Barbara Smith was evidently a "bod" —which is a suckling Philistine.

"Oh, if you can make a living that way, I daresay you'd be a fool not to," she returned. "But it isn't the living I'm considering; it's the effect on you."

Such views were not worth rebutting. It was only the work that ever mattered. Yet an uneasy memory rose in his mind of one other woman who had despised his work. But he put that memory resolutely from him.

"Those are your brothers and sisters that I sometimes see here on Saturday afternoons?" he said.

"Yes, I get my Saturdays off from one o'clock,

and I usually take the train to Penrith and see them all at home. But it is such a treat for the kiddies to come to town that I often stay here and let them visit me. We go to the Zoo ; the kiddies love it, but I hate it. Zoos smell so, don't they? and the animals are so dreadfully like human beings, caricatures of us in which all our wicked moods come out with such terrifying distinctness. I shudder every time I pass the monkey-cage, and there are some kangaroos that have got the silly faces of the portraits I have to retouch, and there's a hyena that I fancy was once a larrikin, and some of the tigers have expressions like those on the faces of men that sidle up and speak to you if you're out in the streets by yourself after dark. And I see all my friends and relations sometimes staring out at me from behind the bars; and once I fancied I caught a glimpse of myself—myself when I'm in my worst mood. I wonder if bishops ever go to zoos? I think zoos and museums—museums are places full of dead things—things that smell stuffy and ought to have been buried decently out of sight centuries ago—I think zoos and museums ought to be stopped. Or, perhaps, it would do if only children were admitted. We grown-ups think too much. We begin to shudder."

King remembered those kiddies — sturdy little country children, whose presences radiated noise with the persistence of radium. He remembered once wondering how she could be so obviously glad to see such commonplace children. He had been irritated by the disparity between the effusiveness of her greeting and the unperturbed stolidity of the objects upon which she sprayed her superfluous kisses.

"And what holidays do you get?" he asked.

"Three days at Christmas, four at Easter, and

then, of course, Queen's birthday, and Prince of Wales' birthday. I always go up to Penrith for my holidays, and we have picnics and black-berryings and drives in the big dray. I'm like one of the kiddies then!"

There was a flush of excitement on her face. King closed his eyes—he was a little feverish—and pictured her as a child. She would have been a demure, serious little thing, already a mother to the younger ones, already cheerfully shouldering her burden. Then he tried to conceive her daily work. The lack of interest in it, the eternal sameness of it, the stifling of every artistic stirring! It seemed to him that, as day after day she smoothed out the lines in the faces on the negatives, she had gradually smoothed out the lines in her soul. She had taken all the colour out of her life, all the meaning out of her universe. The world, as she saw it, was a drab, neutral-tinted thing—the colour of her eyebrows. And she was content, accepted this pallid pretence of life! He contrasted her humility and patience with the fierce rebellion that smouldered in the soul of the Anæmic Niece. He felt a vague contempt for the patient, little young-old woman with the indeterminate eyebrows.

He saw that her future would be but a drear continuous unrolling of her past. She would go on retouching, retouching. There was no hope of her ever marrying, and so escaping from the trivial iteration that life cheated her with as its meaning. Her prim face with its pure, pale complexion, her slim, unnoticeable figure, had in them no quality that would arrest a man's attention. Men instinctively demand emphasis in a woman; the finer nuances are usually overlooked. That is why there are so many nice old maids. Miss Barbara Smith seemed

deficient in sex. He could not imagine any man wanting to kiss her. Besides, she did not seem to consider the possibility of any change. She was manacled to patience, prisoned in content.

Then King contrasted her life with his. She might have had artistic tastes once; but life had smoothed them out of her soul long ago. It seemed to him that she had never grown up. And yet he was surprised to find himself considering her as not young. She was older than King, of course. But she had missed so much in life. The stream of emotion that seemed to colour all his life ran past her quiet personality unsuspected, unenvied.

And he was able, so he believed, to give utterance to every artistic striving within him. He was fully emotioned. The life that he had mapped out for himself provided at least that he would live. Life, as he saw it, meant only the chance of developing one's individuality, of seizing and utilising to its utmost potentiality every factor that made for the growth of the ego, of giving utterance to every aspect of one's personality, of throwing out antennæ of inquiry into every corner of life, of increasing to its fullest capacity every striving that stirred within one. Experience, and the glorious, fully-equipped capacity to experience, made up life.

And this prim, undeveloped Miss Smith of the indeterminate eyebrows—a being as colourless as her name—had never lived, would never live. She would go on, day after monotonous day, retouching, retouching—fading inevitably with the years, until at last she passed almost imperceptibly, almost unperceiving, out of the state she called life. It seemed to King a shameful thing that Miss Smith should so passively accept what fate had offered her. His

manhood stirred in him. He could never so submit; he would for ever struggle, for ever rebel.

And now the contempt that he had felt for this little woman of the mousey ways was tinged with the warm hue of pity. She had not his strength, his belief in himself, his special talent.

He turned on his pillow with words of confused sympathy crowding to his lips. She had left the room, had noiselessly closed the door.

XVII

AFTER this meeting King and the little photographic retoucher frequently met and talked. But a feeling of constraint rose between them as soon as the boy got better. It seemed to the woman that the man did not need her in his health. He seemed to shake her off, as one would shake off a weakness. She was little accustomed to notice from men, and she readily acquiesced in King's lapse into indifference. In her heart she had secretly accounted as a wickedness the fact that she so took advantage of a man's illness to force herself upon his recognition. She felt herself a wanton woman, and she brazenly rejoiced—in the secrecy of her heart—at her guile. She considered it as sharp practice on her part; but she did it, and was not ashamed. Nay, a glow came into her heart as she recalled the devious ways of her great cunning. That is the sort of shameless woman Miss Barbara Smith was.

And Miss Smith never disguised from herself the fact that she was a matter of utter indifference to the world. True, she felt a pleasurable importance when she got off the train at Penrith and marched at the head of a procession of sisters and brothers along the country lane to the farm. At those moments she felt that she comprehended Napoleon. At certain great epochs of his life he must have felt exactly like that.

But for the great world of men and women she knew she was a mere unregarded cypher. And she acquiesced in her position. Really she was of no importance to anybody except her family. There wasn't one man in all the world. I'm afraid that some nights, after she had blown out the candle, Miss Smith cried from the mere sense of loneliness. The Anæmic Niece never cried. She would have scorned the weakness, and it would have made her head ache. In Miss Smith she took no further interest than to despise her utterly for her complacent attitude toward life. And Miss Smith took no notice of her save to deplore her lack of patience. And yet Miss Smith's heart was a pitying one, keen to help and heal. But charity does not diffuse itself broadly like light; it has its affinities and its dislikes, and the two women's personalities inspired in each a mutual misunderstanding and repugnance.

Now that King's financial crisis was so near, his money dribbling, dribbling out, he felt the immediate need of an adviser, a confidant. He had written to his father, pointing out that it was impossible for him to continue his studies and meantime contrive to support himself by art. He suggested a loan.

His father's answer did not lack clarity.

"I disapprove entirely," he wrote in that neat, precise hand of his, "and have always disapproved of your absurd notion of making a living by painting. I shall not assist you to carry out that scheme any further. You have given it ample trial, and the result is not encouraging. If you give up the idea of becoming an artist and return to Dunedin I can arrange for a good legal firm here to receive you as a clerk, and on your passing your final law examinations I shall be willing to set you up in practice. Please understand that this offer is final. If you

persist in your unfilial course, I have done with you. You must take the consequences of your foolishness."

This was signed, with some absence of humour, "Your affec. father."

By the same post came a long letter from his mother, imploring him to return home, and enclosing a postal order for £2, 10s. laboriously scraped by her from a somewhat keenly scrutinised and excessively audited household expenditure.

King tore his father's letter up with a sense of finality.

His thoughts turned to Aroha. Here, he knew, was a friend whose advice would be helpful and sincere. He and she wrote regularly—too regularly, Aroha sometimes reflected, to be genuinely necessary—just the cheerful, non-committal, gossipy notes that pass between friends and keep a waning friendship in a state analogous to that of frozen mutton. It does not decay: it retains its freshness; and though perfectly wholesome and palatable, something of the juice has gone out of it.

Aroha would give him good advice, he felt; but, unfortunately, he knew the advice she would give. She thought little of his views of art, and would welcome his relinquishing such an unsatisfactory pursuit. He would not ask her. Besides, he felt he could not frankly consult her. Her opinion of him was still an asset of value in his thoughts of her, and he was not man enough to acknowledge defeat to her. He would prefer that she still conceived him as a conqueror.

But one evening, as he was sitting out on the balcony after a hard day's work at the studio, he heard Miss Smith slip softly to a seat at the other end of the balcony. It was a still, star-lit night; the air had the fragrant coolness that was the first

breath of the "southerly"; it seemed as if the great sweltering city took a deep breath of relief from the stifling heat of the day.

The gas lamp in the street made her face a pale blur in the darkness. He could see the utter weariness of her attitude as she sat back in the big chair with her hands in her lap, palms upwards, like a tired child. Perhaps she, too, had worked hard that day—and the heat had been terrible. Perhaps she, too, had had problems to solve that to her were as difficult as the balance of a picture.

He rose and went to her. She came back from her reverie almost with a physical effort.

"Why, you've brought me all the way from Penrith!" she said, with a faint laugh.

"Home?" said King.

"Yes, I always go there in my thoughts when—when I've got nothing better to do."

She turned to him brightly. "But you've got something you want to tell me?" she guessed.

It always pleased her to be consulted. It made her affine to humanity, set a seal upon her importance to the world.

King told her.

"So," she murmured, half to herself, "so the young ambition has met its first obstacle? Well, that's good for the young ambition. And, I daresay, once you thought that there were no such things as obstacles—or, at least, that there would never be any obstacles for you? Well, you've just got to climb over them. How old are you?"

King could not resist her question. She treated him as if he were a child and she long had been a mother. But this evening there was a weariness in the boy's brain that craved for the soothing touch of sympathy. In his uncertainty of spirit he shrank

from the responsibility of his manhood. He told her his age—twenty-two years.

"And I'm thirty-three," she said with an indrawn breath. King wondered if it was a sigh; he was not quite sure.

"Of course you're not going to give up?" she said, to make sure. Her brain startled her by clamorously insisting that that was just what he was going to do. She looked on him as a spoilt boy, stirred by young ideals, fine ambitions, delicate instincts, but without that stability of character, that faculty for plodding, which was the foundation of all success in life. She did not know whether his character had depths or not. Conquest proved nothing; it was defeat that tested the fibres. She wanted to watch him when the tide ebbed. She had learnt that, to everyone in this life, no matter how gifted, how fortunate, there comes the hour when Fate says, "Life is too easy for this man, he goes too quickly, he attains too swiftly. The struggle will do him no good; he will pass through the engagement without a mark, without a consciousness that there was an engagement. He will not be able to value achievement, for he has not won success. Let us teach him to remember."

And Fate puts a spoke in that man's wheel. On every man that has risen above the ruck Fate has wreaked her incomprehensible, imperturbable spite; and it is the strong who survive that trial. The great men are those who, wounded in their most vital part, have yet gone on—not so easily, not so swiftly, not so cheerfully, not so splendidly, not so far. Yet they have struggled on, ever with that dragging spoke in their wheel. Or they have mutilated themselves and taken out the spoke—for the spoke is part of themselves; and the mutilated man, with the memory of that hurt still rankling in his

heart, with that wound still tearing at his strength, the blood still oozing, oozing out, has still gone dauntlessly on. That is the great man—the only great man that life allows.

King's reply was prompt. "Of course I'm not going to give up!"

His face lit up with her confidence in him. She was a stranger, and yet she believed in his future.

"But how are you going to do it?"

King's face fell. He was at a pause; the obstacle loomed impassable before him.

"I might manage to hang on for a few months if I lived very cheaply—got into cheaper lodgings," he ventured.

The suggestion stirred Miss Smith from her quietness. She had lived long in boarding-houses, and had come to acquiesce in the fluctuations of that life, the petty whirlpools and chance trivial currents that swept acquaintances from her, and drowned friendships almost before they were grasped. She was not an attractive girl; she had not the personality to keep a friend to herself when she no longer came daily into that friend's life. That was the deep significance that to her a mere change of lodgings sometimes had. She could not hold her friends once they got beyond her personal orbit. She acknowledged herself altogether a colourless personality; and after a month's absence she could not blame the absent if time had blurred her image in their memories. So it was with a sense of clutching at a vanishing hand, swept from her reach by the current of chance, that she combated the idea of King going away. He must not go out of her life. She could do so much for him. It did not strike her till afterwards that she had been horribly selfish.

"That would only defer the inevitable," she said almost vehemently.

King looked in surprise at her face. Her eyes were full of fire.

"No," she went on, "there's no chance of your making a living yet in Sydney by art. You're only a student yet."

He acquiesced unwillingly.

"Then you'll have to do something else—not art."

Already King had glanced, somewhat fearfully, at this possibility. It meant defeat, acknowledgment of failure. So he had shuddered and put the suggestion aside. And now this little mouse-coloured woman at his side suggested it as a probability. But to relinquish art? The idea was preposterous! He told her so.

"But you must get a living, and you needn't altogether give up art. Make it your recreation. Couldn't you get a billet as a clerk in a lawyer's office?"

He humoured her absurd supposition. "Yes, there is an office here where I expect with my legal training I could get an appointment to a clerkship. I know the manager well. But, you know, I couldn't ever do it. I'd have no time for painting."

"Saturday afternoon and all Sunday, and the early mornings and the lunch-hours—oh, there's lots of time to work in!"

"You talk because you've never tried," said King, annoyed at her inexperience.

Miss Barbara Smith noted the anger in his voice. "I find I can do a lot of work in those fag-ends of the day," she said quietly.

"Work? What work do you do?" he asked in faint scorn.

She shrank from his tone as if it were a blow. Did he have such a contempt for her as that? It was cruel of him to let her see how much he despised her.

"I write stories," she said proudly.

"Printed stories?" His tone was one of utter surprise.

"Some of them are. Not in the *Bulletin*, though —I'm not clever enough for the *Bulletin*. But I don't mind much. I think all the fun of writing stories comes in making them up. Once I've written a story I feel I've done everything that is necessary. I just put it away. But they pay you for them—sometimes; so I send them in. But I've got some dear little stories that are my own, that I'll never let anyone else see. They're mine: I made them—and oh, I couldn't let any other eyes desecrate them! They're just hidden away at the bottom of a box, and sometimes I take them out as if they were dolls and play with them; and sometimes I cry over them—they are so dear! And when I saw my first story in the *Australasian* it looked out at me from the type reproachfully—as if it were dead and laid out on the white paper, lifeless and cold and hard. I'm sure it was more human, more living, when it was in manuscript."

King's thoughts were away on his own career. The possibility of entering a lawyer's office had already, beneath the quiet influence of this little woman, become a probability. He would have to give up his days to the drudgery of law, and he had solemnly forsworn that long ago! But there would be the early mornings—the time that in this hot climate he could best work in—and the end of the week. And all the time he would be supporting himself, living his own life and perfecting himself in his chosen art. It would be a fine answer to his

father. But it would be a step downwards, a relinquishing of his hold on his ideal. No, he couldn't do it!

"We've all got to compromise with life," Miss Smith was saying, in her smooth, even tones. "We all have to live; and it seems to me that it really doesn't matter how we pull along as long as the work is honest. But we needn't cramp our lives within the limits of our work-hours. Often when I watch the clerks pouring out of the offices at five o'clock, I think of the day of resurrection. All that array has been all day in the grave, and at five o'clock the trump sounds, and they awake to life. It is grand to see the hope on their young faces! They're men, all of them, not clerks; and the lives they are meant to live are manly lives. Life to them is a bigger, a more spacious thing, than office walls. Why, in your opinion I'm a photographic retoucher. But I know I'm not; I'm a soul! Do you think that when I go to heaven or hell and God asks me who I am I'll say a photographic retoucher? No; I'm a soul, endowed with all a soul's needs and desires. I retouch photographs in order to live. It seems a queer sort of universe, doesn't it? where an individual would cease to be an individual if she didn't keep on retouching photographs! Life has ordered me for a certain portion of my existence to retouch photographs; but that won't prevent me from having my own life unseen, seeking my own ideals and dreaming my own dreams."

She lapsed into a reverie. King felt vaguely annoyed at her detachment from his own concerns. He had come to her for advice, and apparently she had altogether forgotten him.

But she had not. She turned to him again.

"That work in a lawyer's office would be so good

for you," she said. "You've never yet been in touch with life. A little cloudland is necessary to everybody ; but you've got to come down and walk on solid earth for a bit, if you want to reach anything. You ought to feel what life is like, rub shoulders with the crowd."

"But what have I to do with the crowd?"

"You're one of the human crowd; you're one of the workers, one of us."

King paused. This girl was one of the workers, the hopeless, uncomplaining, mediocre workers, and she classed him—him, with his dreams and his talent—with the common crowd! She dared to put him in the ranks.

He was hurt with Miss Barbara Smith. And being yet young, he flashed out petulantly at her and left her.

Miss Barbara Smith smiled slowly and discriminatingly into the darkness.

"He's such a boy!" she breathed. And there was a little envy in her voice. She could remember the time when she might have been as angry, might have as hastily hated the degradation of the crowd.

XVIII

NOW two years went past. Those two years were as important to King's development as the brief periods of which I have regarded it as necessary to fully treat. In those two years every day did something towards the upbuilding or the demolition of the man's individuality. Every evening marked the strengthening or the loosening of some strand in his character; every hour brought its minute contribution to his personality.

On the stage it is the great incidents that influence the persons of the dramatist; in life it is the little, unnoticed, forgotten incidents that mould a man. Life is a growth, neither a series of chapters nor a succession of "curtains."

But to place on view all the causes that go to the making of a man is impossible, and, if possible, would be intolerable. Hence we must drop King Southern at his twenty-second year, predicate two years of life in Sydney, and take him up again upon the pin-point of observation at his twenty-fourth year.

In that interim King had become a law clerk in the office of a Sydney firm, and had settled into his work. It was the only way left open to him, and he had taken it with a bad grace. Yet he discovered that once in the swing of his office-work he did not find it intolerable. Rather, he became interested in his new life. One grows older—even in one's

twenties—one grows less fastidious, one adapts oneself. Life is a soothing thing even to youth.

Meanwhile he had learnt to take his art more sanely, more steadily. He had worked strenuously at his painting outside office-hours, and had achieved some success. He was recognised now as a brilliant student, whose work was always stimulating, and always hinted of the unexpected. Certain critics had recently observed that it was time that Mr Southern showed his ability to paint a big composition. Sketches and studies, however clever, they said, were not enough to form a test of Mr Southern's undoubted ability. He was recognised now, despite his youth, as one of the leaders in the new Australian impressionistic school; but unless he was to remain a mere instance of precocity he must venture further. And—here is a revelation—though King felt the justice of those criticisms, he confessed to himself a curious disinclination to attempt the big landscape that would prove his powers. It was so easy when under the influence of a mighty impulse to produce a cleverly handled sketch; but the composition of a larger effort found him unresponsive.

He did not know the cause of this artistic lethargy. Yet there was one. It was the Australian climate reacting on King's individuality.

New Zealand is a cold and rugged country, a temperate, windswept, sea-washed clime. Australia is a semi-tropical continent, flat and dry under a cloudless, brassy sky, or a more intolerable film of heat-haze. And Sydney, moist and hot, is a climate of enervation. To the Sydney-born, lean, pallid men and women, accustomed to the humid heat of the city—a heat that makes the starched collar limply wilt and disconsolately droop—there was nothing abnormal in the long steam bath of the summer.

The Sydney-born took precautions, moderated his walk to a gentle saunter, crept along the shady side of the street, took frequent trips to the ozone of Manly, ran up for the week-end to the heights of the Blue Mountains, loafed when the heat-wave commanded it, and slouched easily through his summer.

But the dweller of a colder climate, coming from the heady invigoration of the ever-potent sea-breeze of Maoriland, pined under the pitiless dominion of the sun. He walked quickly, forced himself to work with the perspiration running from him, and strove valiantly, with a sense of loss of valuable time, against the enervation of the Australian summer. He tried to work at regular hours—he had so few to spare that he felt the necessity of making the most of every minute; he accepted no warning from the heat-wave.

The Australian will be an artistic people. Under the brilliance of that sky, under the germinating influence of that heat, he will reach heights of artistic expression impossible to his more sturdy cousin in Maoriland. The New Zealander dwells in a mountainous country; and it is not the Himalayas nor the Alps that produce the great poets, the masters of painting and of music. It is the sleepy, level, fat lands, the wide and monotonous plains, the smallnesses of a quiet countryside, or the sordid dreariness of the city that rear genius. Australia's vast, sombre monotony will, by the cogent reason of contrast, inevitably produce a race of idealists who will find in their dreams an instinctive relief from their unstimulating environment. Man, set in that wide, level solitude, will appear larger, taller, more majestic than when dwarfed by the shadow of great mountains. From the contemplation of the uninviting flatness of Australia the Australian will shrink,

to see in his fellows a majesty unknown to his environment. It needs only the sleepy shallows of the Avon, the quiet homeliness and pleasant content of Stratford's thatched cottages, to produce a Shakespeare. The Shakespeare of Australia will come slouching down to the feverish life of Sydney from some drear, sun-baked, God-forgotten back-blocks township, made superbly articulate by the endless and enigmatical silence of the bush.

The New Zealand race, meantime, at ease in a paradise of majestic scenery, will rest content with that. No stimulus, save the great stimulus of patriotism, will call them from their lotus-land. They will have their heaven at hand: what need to stir? They will have found their Fortunate Isles: why further voyage? Like the dwellers in a tropical island, they will not feel the need of initiative; happily and luxuriously down the centuries they may contentedly drift.

But the future may have for them the clarion that will awake them from their dangerous content; and the name of that clarion is war. Some day the whole of the scattered archipelagoes of the Pacific will be under the sway of this island power, and in the need for expansion of trade and ideas, the stirring belief in a great destiny that will follow that great sway, there may come an Elizabethan age to this England of the South. But that lies in the great unknown, below the horizon of the years.

After two years in the moist and enervating heat of Sydney, King found himself subject to strange fits of sloth, careless of his work, distrustful of himself. He had overtaxed his strength by his two employments, and often on an eagerly anticipated Saturday afternoon, when he was to finish a picture of which he had been dreaming all the week, he was

physically so tired that work before an easel was practically impossible. Yet he worked on almost fiercely. He knew he was losing time; almost he feared that he was losing touch with his art. And that was a possibility that kept him awake on many of those hot, still nights, when the city stirred uneasily in its tired sleep, and the mosquitoes kept up their persistent hum outside his mosquito-curtains with an iteration that seemed to the restless brain foolishly virulent, absurdly and insignificantly inexplicable.

He was still at the same lodgings, though only Miss Smith remained of the people whom he had found there. The Anæmic Niece and her aunt had gone back to their country township. Jennie Wave thought the move an ignominious retreat, and fumed under the irksome monotony of the life she had for such a brief time escaped. Her occasional letters to King seethed with petulant discontent. She had seen the doors of paradise open and shut, and stood straining at the bars, beating her hands against the great gate till they bled. What did life hold for such a soul? King replied gently and patiently, and gradually he came unwillingly to be the confidant of all her petulances and irresponsible angers. He soothed and sympathised, blindly doing his best to teach her something of resignation and patience, some acquiescence with life. It amused him to find himself in this *rôle* of comforter. He smiled grimly as he shut the envelopes, for he felt that he was a hypocrite to offer such advice. He tried to imagine himself in her position, and knew that such advice to a man who felt himself a failure in life would be mere idle words. And he knew that to Jennie Wave he was ever the conquering one; he had life in his hands, and could squeeze the orange dry. And now he had almost begun to doubt himself! But to her

life had never opened the door. Then he did not smile; and gradually he came to look on Jennie Wave as a spoilt child given into his care, with whom he must be very patient, for whose life he had become in some vague way almost responsible.

There remained Barbara Smith of the indeterminate eyebrows. She had already made the discovery that she was in love with King. At first she had been thrilled with a great gladness that seemed to have in it a sense of something forbidden. But, wanton woman as she was, that thought but added to the keen pleasure with which all her body pulsed. It was wicked to so greatly dare, to so greatly desire. But Barbara was an abandoned woman; she let her heart rove with a reckless disdain. It seemed to her that the discovery of her love for King made her of more importance to the world; she felt already the experienced lover. She grew proud, and would not chatter to her workmates in the photographic establishment. She dreamed delicious impossible and—she recognised with a delighted shudder—passionate dreams. She wore a hint of pink in her blouse, and as she walked her step had almost an aggressive spring. In fact, Barbara was an abandoned woman for a fortnight.

Then reflection came, and she descended from her pedestal. He didn't love her. Of that she was sure. She considered the matter from all sides in that sane, quiet way of hers, reasoned with herself, argued with her heart, and carefully put the great discovery back into her heart, whence she should never have taken it. She had been a little fool, and surely she was old enough to know better! He did not love her, would never love her. So she packed the stupendous secret within her heart, secure from observation. Sometimes, during the long hot

nights, as she lay awake and heard King close his door when he came in, she took the secret out from her heart and peered fearfully at it with a delicious joy at her great daring. But after a little while she put it away again, wet with tears.

It was indeed her secret; but she had stolen it. That treasure was not for her. She felt that King had never contemplated the possibility of his being in love with her—which was quite wrong; for King had carefully considered that possibility.

Modern novels and modern plays tell us again and again of fatuous heroes ignorant of the heroine's love, and un-feminine heroines who mistake the attentions of the grovelling hero for a bitter hatred; but modern life with its complex of emotions does not allow two intuitive and sensitive minds to be in the same environment without the consciousness of the possibilities of their reaction upon each other. No man who has a girl-friend is so deficient in mentality as to overlook the possibility of his being in love with her. No; the thought that this sane, simple, serious friendship that had grown up between Barbara and himself might be one aspect of love rose in the man's mind, too. He did not put the suggestion away from him without examining it. Only the examination led to the conclusion that he liked Miss Barbara Smith, that he would miss her if they were separated, that she was a good friend who did not demand too much, and that he could contemplate the chance of their separation without any grave tremor. Why Barbara Smith fell in love with King demands further explanation; but the only hint of the causes I can give may be found in the fact that King was the first man whom she had had the opportunity of studying at close quarters. Possibly she found the exercise fascinating. Barbara Smith was a limpet

woman; as long as she could cling, it did not matter much to what.

To Aroha, King wrote occasionally. Absence had severed the interests that once held them together, and often in those two years King found himself looking back on their meeting as a delicate and half-forgotten dream, almost as an occurrence in a previous life. He wondered with a tolerant smile at his previous inexperience. He wondered how he could have ever been so carried out of himself by the presence of a mere woman.

It was just after such a reflection that King met Gertrude Wonder.

XIX

In novels it is the unalterable habit of the hero, unspotted of the world, ignorant of the ways of a woman, to meet a heroine who has never been loved. These two, for the purposes of the novelist, start heart-whole, fancy-free. But in life which of us begins, even a new acquaintance, from a cleared field? We always carry about with us, entangled in our personalities, old acquaintances, unsevered friendships, accretions and attachments of earlier years. Even in love there are always the memories of other friendships that might have been love. Only calf-love starts without a handicap from earlier emotions, and calf-love is usually banned as unworthy of serious consideration.

In a novel one man is marked out as the hero, one woman labelled the heroine. To the practised novel-reader it often seems absurd that the hero, so vividly characterised, does not immediately recognise the ticketed heroine. And the heroine displays culpable negligence in not at once separating the hero from the villain by means of their obvious labels. But in life it is difficult for us to discover our heroes and our heroines. None of us can foresee the last chapter in the novel of his life, when the hero and heroine stand together at the altar plain to see. In life there are always half a dozen possible heroes and as many

heroines. Which are we to pair with which? That is one of the reasons why mothers were made.

Thus it was when King met Gertrude Wonder: neither had come from a cleared field. It was at a little supper at the "Australia" given by a coterie of Sydney artists to which he belonged. He had really gone because a certain girl, in whom he had become vaguely interested as she sat beside him at the night classes of his school, would probably be there. And Gertrude Wonder's prime reason for attending the supper was to have a good time. She had a secondary reason, which was that Jim Hercus would be there. She was somewhat interested in Jim Hercus; he had proposed to her on the previous Friday, and she was still wondering why he did it. He was an artist. She knew herself a very beautiful girl—the fact, beside being patent, was shouted to the skies by every artist in Sydney—but that to her sane and shrewdly practical mind did not seem sufficient excuse. He had not a penny, and apparently had long ago discarded the idea that it would ever be necessary to obtain that penny. When he proposed, feeling vaguely that he should mark the occasion by some proof of his sincerity, he had offered to sell the piano upon which he strove with the accompaniments of the coon-songs of the day. But she had brought a great gratitude into his heart by obviating the necessity for such a sacrifice.

Gertrude Wonder was in the habit of receiving proposals. The Sydney youth proposes with facility, and Gertrude was a very beautiful girl. She was nineteen, of a surpassing richness of colour in a land of delicate, peach complexions. Her features in repose were too perfect to be pleasing, but her face was ever swept with a flood of varying expressions

that took her from the category of a doll. Her copper-hued hair was a crown of glory. She also had a chin.

It was the chin that, up to the present, had saved her from capitulating to the ever recurring proposals. There was a way in which she shut her somewhat large mouth and elevated the chin that gave her an air of finality. Then the man usually discovered that he had been an unmitigated ass, and began to talk of his barren future. Sometimes he merely surreptitiously looked at his watch.

There had been a private secretary at Government House who contrived to snatch a moment between his official duties at a ball to plead for her firm and capable hand, and was kept so busy seeing to the supper arrangements afterwards that he had not time to look heart-broken. There had been middle-aged gentlemen of substantial property and superfluous flesh who wrote courteous notes, offering themselves with a quite pathetic miscalculation of their own personal value. There had been quiet, large-footed young men from the back-blocks, who smoked pipes of obtrusive aroma, and wriggled in silent heroism within creased and unaccustomed evening suits. And —since she had at wide intervals made a kind of principal soprano entrance into certain art-classes— there had been innumerable art-students. In fact, it had become a tradition in the school that, before a man's opinion on tobacco, woman or art was worth consideration, he had to adduce the fact that he had been duly rejected by Gertrude Wonder.

It was a cheerful little supper, given by one of the group in reference to a hypothetical birthday alleged to belong to the principal guest, another art-student. The coterie of which King sometimes formed part was a happy and haphazard one.

Money to this little band was an infrequent miracle, to be swiftly grasped and made use of. Hence when a windfall came to one of them, when one sold a picture or secured an patron, the occasion was seized and commemorated. There was an uncalculating *camaraderie* between the members of this careless group, not one of whom, except King, had a regular salary; and they spent their spare moments in unravelling a series of pencilled calculations as to the amount each owed the other. In consequence they had many of their pleasures in common; and when the lean years came they starved with a combined and united grace. There were glorious days in the country, when they made a boisterous incursion upon the bush, rioted in healthy savagedom, lived long pagan days in the open, bathed and ate and drank, and came back to the city brown and tired and happy. There were great dinners at the "Australia" —dinners in evening-dress and with pretty girls to make toasts to. There were memorable moonlight picnics to Balmoral and Watson's Bay, where they wandered by the water and discussed the colour of moonlight, and settled for ever the meaning of art.

And in the lean years there were little teas round the corner of one of the arcades, at one insignificant café, where for sixpence you got a chop and bread and cheese, as many cups of tea as you liked, and a table napkin. It was the table napkin that differentiated the café from a wilderness of cafés. There the rule was for everybody to scrupulously pay for himself, and the man who exalted his financial soundness by asking for another chop was subsequently compelled to suggest coffee for all.

To this supper at the "Australia" Jim Hercus brought a bouquet of roses—an offering of despair

upon the altar of Gertrude Wonder's queenly frown. He felt that he was strewing flowers on a freshly-made grave. She accepted an uncompromising rose from the lavish bouquet, and Jim was partially exalted.

The girl in whom King was vaguely interested was not there, and chance placed him opposite Gertrude Wonder. Jim Hercus sat next her; she conversed with a sacrificial air. She felt herself immolated on the altar of good manners.

Between the glowing luxuriance of the flowers that decorated the table King saw her freshness and beauty shine like a rose. She consciously queened it that night. What a vivid miracle of beauty she was! In the pauses of his conversation with his companion his eyes were held by the splendid arrogance of her pose, the pride of her level glance. She was majesty and youth.

Once her glance met his boldly. In her eyes King seemed to divine a delicate, intimate appeal. He felt that he had known her many years. He found himself engaging her in talk, leaning eagerly forward toward that queen of the roses. A strange vivacity took possession of him, leading him blindly on. He talked brilliantly. He felt her presence, warm and human, opulent with youth and sex, enveloping him. He thrilled at his perilous nearness to her. He shuddered in a sudden terror of the future.

She noticed for the first time that the pale, big-eyed youth opposite her—he painted clever pictures, they said—was curiously attractive. As she drew her eyes away from his after that straight, level gaze she seemed to feel her personality slip away from her; almost she felt herself submissive in his arms. She drew her eyes away, angered and startled at herself. What had happened? What had she done?

This was not the love of which Jim Hercus and the middle-aged gentlemen had spoken. She wondered. . . .

After supper there was a pause. Gertrude gave Jim his final word: she left the bouquet of roses on the table and moved away forgetting. It was on the balcony overlooking Castlereagh Street that, half an hour later, King found her. The others were in the room, from the open window of which came the voices of the company in a subdued murmur. These two were alone on the balcony. King approached her.

There was some vague talk, mere surface froth of the deep currents that swayed them unseen, unacknowledged. Each was strangely elated. Overhead a great moon queened it in a faint blue sky, dimming the wide canopy of stars. The moonlight lay like a heavy flood upon the street; the world was dim and drowned in waves of dull silver. From their high balcony they could see Sydney beneath them glimmering—a city of spires and domes—silent beneath the lush warmth of the southern night.

Far down the narrow street someone was thrumming a mandoline, and an Australian voice, passionate and tremulant and rich, floated up to the balcony. And as they stood in that great silence of the evening it seemed to them that gradually the silence gathered voice, and upon them broke heavy waves of distant sound—the night throbbed and pulsed, restless, watching, expectant. Some vague thing seemed imminent; the night knew.

Romance hovered about them with insistent wings, very near. They were caught in the influence of that magical hour, swayed by the mood of the moon. By an insistent Nature, ever cunning to work her ends, ever on the watch to achieve her distant goals, these two were flung into each other's arms.

But they talked quietly, with a restraint upon them that was outwardly the same, yet in each proceeded from a different cause. The girl was held back by a new terror of herself, a horror of this novel thing that seemed to swamp her individuality, overwhelm her ego and sweep her—whither? It was the instinctive prudence of the woman, the unreasoned sagacity that had come from centuries of flight, passiveness, repression, retreat.

But the man recognised the reason of his exaltation. He was beginning to love this woman; and he was startled to find how swiftly he had gone, how impossible now it was to regain the friendly shore of the normal. This was no boyish passion, no ideal love among the hills, no miracle-meeting in the land of dream; it was love—love of the mature man for his mate, love that would take no refusal, that would persist to the end. It shook him like a physical thrill. He desired this woman for himself; he was jealous of the world that had kept her so long from him. He knew that she was immemorially meant for him. And he would take her, ruthlessly. It seemed to him that all his life had led to this; that this moment was the culmination of his existence, of the existence of the whole universe. For this meeting, this clash of two personalities, this startling recognition of two chance-driven souls, the whole cosmos had been laboriously created. Perhaps Nature pardoned the extravagance; for it is by such extravagances that subtle Nature wins her ends.

And the actual conversation of these two, if I were to write it, would be bald and possibly incomprehensible. They talked hesitatingly of themselves, made stupendous unforeseen and unknowing revelations of each personality to the other. In that hour of hap-

hazard conversation upon the balcony of the "Australia," when they seemed forgotten by their noisy friends inside, forgotten by all the world—save, possibly, Jim Hercus—and, therefore, prompted by an unexpressed sympathy, they drew nearer to each other—in that chance meeting it seemed to each that they had compassed centuries. There was no time when they had not known each other. They had existed side by side from the beginning of things.

The girl listened to his halting phrases greedily. She was dazed with an incomprehensible exaltation. She only knew that it was very sweet. She only knew that this man, picked from all the world and placed before her, was strangely interesting. When they were at last recalled from the balcony, and the party broke up, she went home in a glow, wondering.

And King walked proudly home through Hyde Park, confident, greatly ambitious, sure of his future, sure of himself, drunk with happiness and the great possibilities of happiness that swam before him as he strode. Here was the acme, the goal of his life. His talent, his genius, his self, he would pour out for the sake of this one woman. He had met his mate—the sole reason for his existence.

And never once on that long walk home did King's thoughts light for a moment on a single memory of Aroha.

XX

THE phases of their acquaintance succeeded each other breathlessly. Within a month the two had grown friends that acquiesced in each other's weaknesses and understood. They took each other's personality as it was; the startling differences of outlook that belong to such diverse beings as men and women they were astonished at, but always they excused. He was a man, with a man's crudenesses; she a woman, with a woman's meannesses. That was the conclusion, the truce upon which they concluded every quarrel. For there were quarrels.

The girl continued to be surprised at the change in herself. She wondered at the metamorphosis from a light-hearted girl who laughed through life to the woman who was conscious of unhappiness, who felt herself being driven adrift on a strange sea, who began to understand that there were regions in this commonplace life into which she had never before even idly peered. She began to experience a vague sympathy for the men who had proposed to her. For the first time it occurred to her that, after all, they might have been in earnest, that all their sighs, their protestations, their appeals, might have been sincere. And she had lightly laughed at them, and sent them away with a slight contempt for their foolishness. And now suddenly it appeared to her that she had been heartless, cruel. She had not understood; she had laughed at them. How they

must have hated her for it! She almost decided to write and apologise—at anyrate, to the last two or three. She could not bear to be thought callous.

But though she did not write she conceded to herself that those men had been in earnest. She began to see that it was a rather disconcerting thing to be in earnest. Life was not one long picnic. She had anticipated life as a playground, full of sunny afternoons, with a certain dark door in the distance through which she must one day enter into some vague pleasaunce beyond, leaning on an unknown man's arm, with certain girl-friends flinging rice upon her and a hard ring hurting her finger. But that was afar and dimly seen; meantime, there was life and youth to be partaken of. And it was a goodly and a satisfying feast.

And one day the recognition came suddenly to her that life was a serious thing, a fearful thing, a thing that surrounded her, came close to her, enveloped her, plucked her by the arm, peered into her affrighted eyes, caught her up in mighty arms, and would carry her, shrieking, into the unknown.

It happened thus. King had asked her to meet him in the city one afternoon. There would have been tea and a stroll in the Gardens. But Gertrude refused; she never met men in town by appointment. King's entreaties were vain. Gertrude had a chin. So in anger he had left her.

It was a fortnight before they met again. During that interval Gertrude had more than once come into town with the comforting conviction that she would meet King. She would like to see him again; almost against her will—certainly against her pride—she had become interested in him. And when they did meet one afternoon in Pitt Street it was one of those pitiless, persistent rainy days that

occasionally afflict Sydney. The city was washed naked, the clean wood-blocks shone as if transparent, the pavements were white beneath the spatter of heavy rain. Under verandahs stood groups of people in gleaming mackintoshes. Splashing umbrellas hurried along the almost deserted streets.

She hastening for her ferry-boat, he rushing for the cable-tram, they met.

"I'm sorry about not meeting you," began the girl, hurriedly. "I've changed my mind."

King's heart triumphed. But all he said was, "Oh, have you?" Then he muttered a curt "Good-bye!" and left her in the rain, staring and angry.

The girl resumed her way to Circular Quay. She felt sick and miserable. He did not want her, had outgrown his liking for her. And it had begun to be pleasant for her to have him hanging on her words, to let him abase himself before her frown, to allow him to offer her perpetual incense with his eyes. It was nasty and mean of him to treat her so. And she was wet through and felt that she was getting a cold. Well, she would never, never let him see how he had hurt her. She would go on with life, would not care. Only, she wanted so much to see him again, to make it all right.

Next morning King received a letter from her. She was giving a little picnic, she wrote, next Thursday afternoon, and would he join? Only a few were coming; it was quite impromptu. If he cared to come he was to be at the Watson's Bay boat at half-past four. He would.

At that eagerly-expected hour he was at Circular Quay. He went on to the pontoon and looked to see the familiar faces of the coterie that went to

picnics. He saw no one, not even a collection of baskets and billies. He boarded the boat. Gertrude Wonder was on the upper deck.

"Well," he said, "where is the picnic?"

Gertrude smiled.

"I'm the picnic!"

"Oh!" said King, comprehending.

They landed at Watson's Bay and went slowly up the steep hill. She was dressed in an old print, and wore a big, black picnic hat that had seen wear. He had never seen her dressed so commonly. It seemed to admit him into a sweet companionship with her. She could afford not to dress well for him, to let her mere self suffice. She had accepted his friendship as a familiar and intimate thing. He was very happy.

They paused at the Gap, watching the great ground-swell of the Pacific thundering steadily upon the scattered rocks at the base of the cliffs. Then they turned along the road that ran between ocean and harbour, passing the white shaft of the light-house and entering upon the road that ran towards the city. There was bush on both sides of them, and from their elevated path they looked down, here upon the smooth inlets of the harbour, here upon the interminable levels of the Pacific. Far ahead the spires of Sydney glittered whitely.

A brilliant, flame-coloured hibiscus bush attracted their gaze. Gertrude picked a spray for her belt, and lightly gave King one of the vivid blossoms. He took it as though it were a precious thing. To the girl the bestowal of a flower was nothing; she forgot it the moment after. But King treasured it jealously. But years afterwards, in turning out an old box, he came upon an envelope with the brittle remains of a dried blossom in it, and after puzzling

for a minute about it, failed to put his finger on the memory it embodied, and threw it away.

As, at last, they turned back to the Bay they saw the ferry-boat far beneath them just backing out from the wharf. They would have to wait at least two hours for the next boat. The swift twilight was coming; King suggested tea. They went into a little inn by the road, and in a little room looking out over the ocean—out of which a great yellow moon was majestically stepping—they had tea. As Gertrude sat down King saw a swift vision of her as his wife seated at the end of his table. He felt almost afraid at the temerity of the thought.

The girl was thoroughly enjoying herself; she was "having a good time," and Gertrude's philosophy of life was to have a good time. And to-day she was going to enjoy to the uttermost; she had resolutely put away from her the doubts and suspicions that had recently disturbed her with so strange a mistrust of herself.

And King watched her pouring out the tea, almost with a reverence, and was proud of her grace and charm, and felt an insistent desire to take all the miracle of her being into his arms and tell her he loved her.

After tea they wandered into the moonlight upon the cliffs. A narrow track led a little way under the brow of the precipice, and sheltered from the world they found a ledge and sat down. The moon stooped over the wide ocean; it was as if its robe of silver swept the waves. In the world there were only the moon and the ocean. The great Pacific lay at their feet, unrolled to the ends of the earth. A thousand miles across that dim, wide pathway lay New Zealand, the land he had for ever left, the starting-place whence he had set out on his way to fame.

Beneath them thundered the heavy ground-swell of the Pacific, great silky, silent rollers coming, mysterious and enigmatical, from some forgotten storm lost in that great immensity. There was something terrible, implacable, in the way in which those wide rollers came on and on across unimaginable spaces of the calm ocean, stirring far shores with the echoes of an unseen wrath long spent. It seemed to him that the unreasoning persistence of these crude, stupendous things was like the laws of God, moving in a grim silence undeviatingly across a universe.

They talked of themselves. What else has youth to talk of? What else does youth want to hear? And all the time the moon and the heavy sullen breakers and the solitude of the night enveloped these two in an enchanted veil. The dim stars mutely watched, aloof, incurious. They were too old to wonder.

Suddenly, in the midst of their talk, they paused. The girl looked up at King, and a faint, tired sigh came from her lips. There was a long silence, in which she felt her heart throb within her with a maddening loudness. She felt that King must hear it. She was vaguely afraid, she did not know of what. All her being called out to him ; then—as never before—she craved to be loved, to be taken in arms that would crush her, wound her by the very intensity of their passion. And she would not cry out, would not struggle. He would stop her weak plaints with a kiss of mastery.

In a minute it was done. He was standing before her, stammering in uncouth words his love for her. Her hurrying heart filled in the hiatuses of his speech. She went before him in his words. Yet she was startled by the torrent of his love ; it threatened

her, seemed to drown her, to sweep her breathless from her feet.

"I love you, Gertrude. I shall give up my life to you. I want you—you, only, in my life. You were made for me. And, by God! Gertrude, I will have you!"

"No, no!" she cried in a sudden terror. "I do not know, I cannot tell. This is all new to me. I have not thought about it. It is too quick, too terribly certain!"

But he had her in his arms, and his lips were taking toll of her face and neck. She struggled with a divine zest in her resistance. She knew it was hopeless; yet—being a woman—she was reluctant for her joy. It was so sweet to toy thus with an assured happiness. She was sufficiently feline to taste the full flavour of her triumph before she let herself be swallowed up by passion.

And at last she lay white and helpless in his arms. But he would not let her go.

Then something in her revolted. This was too masterful, too real.

He felt the shudder that ran through the body he held. He loosed his arms. Then for the first moment since he took her in his arms he was conscious of existence. He looked up. The quiet moon, cold and aloof, stood high over the sea; the dim stars seemed swept together in one thick veil. And from beneath the cliff came sullenly up the recurrent heavy moan of the Pacific rollers, like the slow, unmoved beating of the vast pulse of time. He shrank from the inevitableness, the implacability, of those slow, silky lifts of the passive ocean. He felt himself caught in the merciless grip of unimagined forces, held helpless and puny between contending universes of might. How unutterably fragile and contemptible

was a mere human life to the grand persistence of that army of the ground-swell, like destiny sweeping in widening waves from that unseen and long-dispersed centre! What were his foolish convictions, his little doubts, his puerile struggles compared to the majestic soullessness of those predestined, slowly-moving rollers of the wide Pacific?

"You had no right to kiss me!" Gertrude cried passionately.

The voice recalled him to her. He had taken her in his arms, he had told her he loved her.

"I love you," he said. "And you love me."

"No!" she said swiftly. It was clear to her now. This surrender of hers was a thing of a moment, a chance phase. He had no right to take advantage of her feeling for him. It was unfair of him. He had lowered her by that embrace. Her anger flashed out at him.

"No! I do not love you. You have degraded me by that kiss. How can I ever respect myself again? Oh, you have terribly changed me, King!"

He was silent. He had nothing to say.

"Come," she said quietly, "let us be friends. Nothing has happened. We shall forget all that, won't we? And we will be the same friends again."

He felt a dull anger growing within him against her. Or was it against himself? He could not say; and he was too tired to think. They turned to go up the hill cliff to the brow of the hill. The harbour lay beneath them, a constellation of dim lights. Just above their heads swung the long pencil of light from the lighthouse. It seemed to King like the flashing of a sharp sword.

As the little ferry-boat thrashed her way across the quiet waters of the harbour back to Circular

Quay, the trail of white waves in the moonlight was the only thing he saw. King could recall it, a picture vivid and palpable, throughout his life. To him ever afterwards there was something hopeless, sullen, despairing in the flash of white waves under the moon.

XXI

WHEN King met Gertrude again she was very gentle, very patient, very winning. She seemed sorry for him; her eyes wished to console him. But her lips said no word of sympathy. She would not allow him to speak of love, to recall that night at Watson's Bay. King tried once or twice to explain himself, but she possessed a keen intuition of the forbidden subject and promptly warded it off.

So at last King and she settled down on the quiet basis of friendship. The girl knew—and perhaps the friendship was the more delightful to her for the fact—that King's passionate love smouldered close beneath the surface, perilously ready to break to flame. Gertrude knew herself able to damp that smoulder; for she had taken the discipline of herself into pitiless hands, and would have no further treachery within her heart. It was very nice to have a man at your feet—and to keep him there. In those days Gertrude tasted the deep joy of the tyrant.

And King, unable to divine her heart or to glean the meaning of her words—for, lover-like, her every little word, her every trivial gesture he freighted with a momentous meaning, her every attitude was a vast portent—lay in a delightful slavery, too happy sometimes to wish a term to his servitude, too grateful for the privilege of her splendid smile to feel impatience.

And Gertrude was making discoveries in herself. She was gradually moulding herself into a new personality. The recognition of the existence of love as a thing that concerned herself, as a thing that was not merely confined to books and the stage, as a thing that audaciously entered into her own life, had transformed her from girl to woman. And yet she did not love King; she was too new to the idea of love to be sure. She felt that so much of life was to her yet an unexplored country; she had passed through so much of life, as it were, blindfold. Life held yet for her—so she was just beginning to divine—strange surprises, wider outlooks, stupendous revelations. She shrank from surrendering with a too swift eagerness to the first siege. She would try life first, taste and remember its savour. She was too young, too alert, too vivacious to close the door yet upon the world. For to her girl-mind marriage represented the closing of the door. She was too proud to surrender her personality yet to that of another—even to that of the loved one. Besides, in her heart, she was a little afraid.

Yet this she recognised—she was a different woman now. She had received her first lesson in life. Now she began to consider men from a new standpoint. They were all possible lovers. She entered into a new world. She saw love everywhere about her.

Hence it was that when Roy Underwood came down from the back-blocks for a holiday and was introduced to Gertrude he met with an approving glance from the girl's enlightened eyes. Roy was strong, lithe, mighty, masterful. His breezy, sanguine manner, his open, keen-eyed, sunburnt face, his big stride, his six feet of muscular youth, his contempt for smart clothes, his powers with the

cricket bat, his easy grace on horseback, his mastery of the pair of greys he habitually drove, prejudiced everybody with whom he came in contact into taking him for granted. He effused life; his laugh was incarnate youth. The son of a rich squatter, himself already the manager of a vast sheep-station in New South Wales, he had come to Sydney for a holiday, and city life, which he had forgotten for years, fascinated.

So when, the second time he met Gertrude, he asked her to come for a drive with him, she found herself rather unexpectedly consenting. The fact was that he did not give anyone the chance to refuse. His swift assurance that everybody must fall in with his arrangements was too palpable to admit of any but the most distinct individualities protesting.

And when the next time he called at Gertrude's house and found her just going out, he was disappointed, but not disconsolate. He told her that her engagement would keep; meantime he was here with his dogcart, and she would not be foolish enough to miss the chance of a drive. Gertrude told him her appointment was a most important one. But she accepted the drive only as far as the ferry wharf, and crossed alone to the city to meet King. He drove off in utter astonishment at her unreasonableness. Gertrude met King, yet during the walk they took in the Gardens she could not help recurring once or twice to the drive she had refused, and ended with the fervent wish that Providence would in the future so arrange things that two such engagements would not clash.

It did not take Roy Underwood long to discover that Gertrude was more interested in King than consisted with a whole heart. He met King and

was reassured. That pale-faced, thin fellow with the woman's eyes the mate for such a splendid piece of womanhood as Gertrude! He dismissed the thought as absurd, and reasoned himself into a pleasant humour by contrasting his own fine physique, his capacity for doing things, his belief in himself, his unconquered desires, his healthy outlook on life with the hesitant spirit, the overweening ambitions of the artist-clerk who was neither artist nor clerk.

Roy felt the instinctive contempt of the strong man who has achieved his trivial ambitions to the unsuccessful one who has yet his star to reach. Roy had gone on step by step through life, moving along a securely-fenced road where every stage on his progress showed clear before him; it was beyond his comprehension that, with the plain highway of life open to all, there should yet be some who preferred to choose a path of their own—a path that would probably end in the mists of despair and disillusion, that might possibly lead to heights undreamed of even by the perverse wayfarer seeking them. Roy aimed prosaically at being rich, and probably experienced as fine an enthusiasm in his ambition as King felt in his. Already Roy Underwood was a prosperous young man; before he had done he would be the richest run-holder in New South Wales. And—the matter was now clear to him, had perhaps been clear to him the moment he saw Gertrude—he meant to take this girl back to his run as his wife. Mentally he swept King magnificently from his path. The artist-clerk irritated him by his appearance of unsuccess. Roy felt that for a man to be unsuccessful in his business —whether that business was painting pictures or growing sheep—was the one unpardonable sin.

And King learned soon to take into account that new factor of Roy Underwood. He found that already Gertrude had accepted him as a fixed concomitant of her environment. She became more difficult, more incomprehensible. King had acquiesced in the belief that he understood her character, her clarity of soul, her sincerity of purpose; the absolute, almost brutal, naturalness of her frank personality had seemed to him to be her greatest and most compelling charm. She was clear, translucent to the divining eyes of the true lover. There was in her a directness, a knowledge of what she wanted, that was almost masculine. And it was the latent femininity in King's being that was mated with her direct strength.

But now there was something inexplicable in the girl. Her soul had suddenly clouded; she drew herself away from his eyes. He felt that a door was being slowly shut upon him—a door through whose opening he had divined delightful intimacies beyond. Now she seemed to do the unexpected thing—and he was just beginning to understand her! This to King was almost an insult. He grew perplexed, annoyed.

The truth was, of course, that the girl's soul was now to her also an inexplicable thing. She was beginning to love both men. There were moods in which she became impatient of King's mere presence. He talked too much of his art, his ambitions; privately she was beginning to think that he achieved too little, aimed at too much. Then there were moments when Roy's sturdy progression through life, his obstinate refusal to recognise obstacles, his serene optimism, seemed to her the mark of the dullard. She saw herself helpless in his pitiless hands and knew he had the power to wound her

horribly by his lack of sympathy, of intuition. King she could sway with a glance: for Roy's help she would have to piteously plead. And the woman in her had a little contempt for the man whose moods she could so easily play upon, and a terrible and growing fear of the man whose personality had no moods.

And this confused ebb and flow of her personalities gradually calmed to one clear thought. She felt the fascination of the mouse in the paws of the cat; it would solve every difficulty, cut this great tangle of perplexity for ever, if she threw herself in passive surrender into the arms of the strong, uncomprehending, brutal, pitiless man. Like all women—like all the world—it was strength that she finally, intimately worshipped. The need for the strength that is in the fibres of a man was as real to this strong woman as to the veriest kitten of an anæmic girl. The fineness of the fibre, in the ultimate analysis of the woman-soul, was nothing to her. She asked with all her being to be wrapped in the protection of a stern, pitiless, masterful masculinity. Already, though none of the three knew it, the die had been cast.

But one onlooker saw already the end of the strife. This was Miss Barbara Smith. A chance meeting with King and Gertrude walking together in the Gardens told her—the man, a prey to his nervous organisation, open to a hundred pin-pricks that to him would be wounds, too finely strung ever to do more than dream of ultimate happiness: the girl, in the supremacy of robust physical health, aglow with youth, sedate with an assured and stable personality. That girl would not for long be content with so slight a man ; the two types did not mate. They might go the foolish length of marrying; but the

end would come. She prayed it might come before marriage.

And that night Miss Barbara Smith learned something else. She began to see a little into her own unlined, placid soul. As she lay awake in bed she began to hate with a malice inexplicable that splendidly beautiful girl of the arrogant eyes. "That creature," as she caught herself calling her, did not understand King, would never understand him. And Miss Smith, in the vindictiveness of her tiger-heart, audibly repeated to the night the term "creature." She found a keen joy in the word. She had never guessed before how she could hate. She began to feel a little afraid of herself—at this quiet being that she had called herself that now flared out into such a passion of jealousy. What was she developing into? She thought with a thrill that a murderess must feel as she felt then towards that woman of the arrogant eyes who so despised and swayed her King. And the strange thing is that Miss Barbara Smith was not ashamed of her hatred. She felt a little pride in the possession of so much of the tiger in her soul.

And that girl would criticise, perhaps despise, the boy! How Barbara hated her!—the creature!

But she would not think of her any more. She turned her thoughts to King and let them linger there gratefully. How she loved him and his weaknesses! In her soul Barbara Smith jealously mothered him.

XXII

FOR the approaching annual exhibition of the Society of Artists in Sydney King had put forth a special effort. He felt that the big canvases upon which he had been so jealously working for the past ten months were to be the test of his ability. For years he had been feeling his way to the artistic expression that here he seemed to have reached. This was his summing-up, his justification. By these big canvases he would be judged; from the verdict of this, his first complete work, he would not appeal.

During all these months of work upon these pictures, King had gradually felt himself emerging from the insecure; he saw the difficulties of technique silently and quietly drop away from him. The brush offered no longer any obstacle to his expression of himself. He had won through the learner's stage, and was now ready to prove his belief in himself by great and ambitious work. He had done with studies and poses; he would paint a picture.

And now that the time was approaching for the exhibition King grew more and more anxious, more and more uncertain of his work. It seemed to him that he was even a little uncertain of himself; once or twice he caught himself contemplating the chance of comparative failure, the possibility of a grave mistake. But a glance at his slowly-maturing work reassured him. There stood his vindication. The critics of to-morrow would recognise his sincerity.

He would recover from this temporary despondency, the natural result of too prolonged work in the studio and in the office. Undoubtedly he was feeling a little run down; the double life was beginning to tell; the heat had been terrible; he had not been able to get away to the mountains for the summer; he had not been sleeping well during the last few weeks.

But he was not dismayed: his pictures stood before him to comfort him. His work would tell.

One Sunday night, after a long day's work in his studio, these drifting doubts suddenly took more palpable shape. He had been all day working almost feverishly at his largest composition. He had exhausted himself in a strenuous effort to finally "pull it together," and when the light failed he had left his studio in disgust, unsatisfied, doubtful, distrustful of himself. He walked rapidly through the city, making instinctively for the open air and the cool breeze that would be found by the harbour's edge. He turned slowly into the Domain, and finding the Botanical Gardens shut he continued beneath the avenues of figs till he reached that point known as Macquarie's Chair. There the quiet lap of the waters seemed to soothe his quick pulse. He cast himself down on the hard dry grass beneath the shadow of a heavy-foliaged fig, and saw the water beneath him like a sheet of dull, dark glass. Across the harbour the lights of North Shore towered high like some ancient castle perched on a rocky eyrie. And, as he idly let his glance stray, a ferry-boat, like a smouldering torch, swam in a gleaming brilliance of silver across the bay. The night was breathless and warm.

King was tired out. A terrible despondency fell upon him. Often before he had felt this ebb of hope,

this long slackness of his enthusiasm. But those fits of despair had been as brief as they had been keen, and he had learnt to recognise that no poignancy of despair could endure indefinitely. A great grief burns itself swiftly out; despair, like joy, can, from its own keenness, be but short-lived. And he was sufficiently a materialist to have learnt that no attack of "the blues" is proof against a good night's sleep, even a good dinner.

But even a reflection so valuable as that avails little at the moment. It comforts little to consider that to-morrow the aspect of the world must necessarily be brighter. There is the long night to get through. And this evening it seemed to King as if the tide of enthusiasm, the tide of hope and of youth, was flowing for ever out and out, as if this slack-water of his heart would never change, this dreary ebb of despair never show signs of the long-prayed-for flow.

Above him was the heavy blackness of the fig-tree; before him the jewel-chain of lights across the water where the city preened herself for the embraces of the night, the swift trains of light as the ferry-boats swept to and fro, a snorting tug that fussed noisily from Wooloomooloo wharfs with a slim-sparred schooner in his teeth; across the warm-scented night the faint bugle call from one of the squadron of warships off Garden Island; and high over him the incurious, passionless stars watching him without a tremor. And the man proved himself at the same moment infinitely smaller and infinitely greater than the night, than the silence, than the stars. For he had that weakness in him that was not in all that host of stars. He doubted. And from his doubt he and his weakling race might rise to the mastery even of that untroubled, unhesitant, passionless galaxy of suns.

He questioned the value of his work, of his life. A terrible sickness of soul came drearily upon him. Was he ever to do aught in the world? Were all his immature strivings to end in bitter failure? Suppose, after all his splendid confidences, he were destined to achieve nothing? And if he bore in himself the inevitable inability to do anything? What if he that had always set himself apart from the rest of his kind were merely one of the undistinguished ruck, an ignoble soldier in the ranks of the incapable? What if he were unable to escape from the dead level of common humanity, whose destiny in this life is to do their trivial daily tasks, live and die, and the world know not of them, care not for them?

What was there, then, left for him to do? He could see nothing ahead. His art was all that he had; if that were proved a useless thing, he felt that existence was but a futile and trivial cheat.

He knew then that it was not fame that he wanted; it was the knowledge of his ability that he craved. Fame he felt to be the pleasant halo about the head of success. No; fame was an empty thing; he did not need that. But it was his own opinion of himself that he felt he so strenuously craved. That was the important thing. He wanted a justification for his existence. He wanted the great and steady joy of an assurance that his was not a wasted talent. His self-respect cried out for the certainty that he was of use.

And now a faint hope rose in him; the long ebb had begun imperceptibly to slacken. There was Gertrude. He was of value to her; she believed in him. And if he had it in his personality to inspire that trust in him from one soul, there was no need to despair. He would carry on the warfare with a serene confidence in himself. Even if he had failed

in his chosen profession, he had not failed in life. As a man, at least, a man able to inspire love in a woman's heart, he had merited his place in existence. A growing confidence thrilled him with a faint delight.

Over the edge of the night sprang the moon, full, glowing, monstrous, amber. The dim velvet of the warm darkness grew hard and cold. The city's spires cut sharply into the pale blue steely sky. The harbour's waters took vivid shape, like a great, newly-opened, wonderful blossom of flame.

And a keen light seemed to flood King's brain, showing with a pitiless severity the thought that lurked shrinking and restless there. Did Gertrude believe in him, love him? He had not won her; she fled from his direct questioning. She was not sure. And all the warmth faded from his heart. It and the night were dominated only by the swift brilliance of the moon.

With a groan King rose and turned from the water's edge and went swiftly back to the city. Within his brain one thought was growing to the grandeur of an obsession. He must not hesitate; he would put it to the test this night. He reached his studio, and mounting the long flights of stairs let himself into the silent room.

The moonlight, pitiless and blinding, flooded the studio. Upon the easel stood his big canvas, shrouded by a cloth. With a desperate fear at his heart he uncovered the painting. The moonlight was to be his judge; he would abide by the impassive, incurious, mute decision of that light. He would let the long dead and long cold satellite of the world, that far solitary stranger in space, with his aloof and dispassionate gaze, decide the value of his work.

He stood back. The unfamiliar light fell with a pitiless candour upon his great painting. And King saw it as he had never seen it before. It took on another aspect—an aspect terrible and strange. Like the dissecting knife of a great surgeon too intent upon the precision of his work to be troubled about the agony of his patient, the moonlight laid bare his work in all its pitiless reality. Unsoftened, untouched by a human imagination, it lay there dead. King felt that he was not looking at it through his own eyes. Some unimpassioned critic that had no soul—some mere callous, undeviating judgment—stood before it and criticised with an inhuman perspicacity the trembling, fumbling effort of a human and immature soul.

King put his hands before his eyes and sank upon a chair. His great painting was a failure.

He had seen with an aloof vividness all its ineffectiveness, all its banality, all its weaknesses. He could not paint. There was no artistic instinct in him. He was forever barred from the paradise of his dreams. He was one of the ruck, of the triflers, the inefficients.

His hand blindly groped in the paint-box at his side, and with a desperate swiftness closed on a palette knife. He took it up and came close to the easel. Turning his head aside he raised his hand against the picture. But his eyes could not resist the last glance at what he yet felt was part of himself. He was going to wound himself in a vital part. He was going to kill something which seemed woven into his soul. He looked again—for the last time. He might want to remember.

And in that swift, keen-searching survey his eye caught a piece of rather clever brushwork which in his previous examinations of the picture he had

rather passed over. He remembered suddenly the day when he had at last mastered the problem of that light upon the model's shoulder; he recalled in its spontaneous vividness the great thrill of exultation he had felt when he recognised that here he had won a victory that summed up many a day of desperate striving. Here he had reached another goal on the long and dreary road.

He paused. His hand fell to his side. The knife clinked to his feet.

XXIII

BOTH Gertrude Wonder and King had received invitations to a picnic at National Park for the day upon which the Society of Artists opened its annual exhibition. The picnic was given by a lady whose interests were not in art, and Gertrude declared her intention of going. The exhibition could keep; and the only invitations to picnics or dances that she ever refused was when two reached her for the same day. Even then she felt aggrieved with Fate that she had to make a choice.

King had nearly written a refusal when this declaration of Gertrude's reached him, and he promptly wrote an almost effusive acceptance. He meant, at the first opportunity, to put to the test the recurring doubt of the sincerity of Gertrude's love for him; and this picnic promised the chance. He was also not sorry to find an excuse for staying away from the opening of the exhibition. He was afraid to compare his pictures with those of his rivals. He would let the critics first pronounce judgment. Meantime he would have settled a much more important matter.

So on the opening day of the exhibition he had joined the hilarious party at Redfern, and talked picnic talk with a bevy of picnic girls. Gertrude was surrounded by her girl friends—for she had the power of inspiring in younger girls an unreasoning

heroine-worship that she found sometimes slightly embarrassing. The party included a fair sprinkling of men, all in flannels, among them, straight and splendid in his bronzed health, Roy Underwood. At National Park station they got out and strolled with much laughter and noise down the long cutting that led to the narrow arm of the sea below. Here a launch awaited them, and they crowded upon it. Then the little boat backed out and started on its journey down the narrow, winding water-way walled by the grotesque iteration of the haggard Australian gums. They had lunch on shore at a Government accommodation house, where the grapes and the passion-fruit hung upon the trellises of the garden walls in a profusion that pleaded to be relieved. After lunch the party broke up into little groups and wandered about the bush, finding wild flowers at every step.

All day King had striven to have Gertrude to himself, but she was altogether too popular a girl, too much in request, too well-informed as to her value, to give up to one what was meant for a picnic-party. And if King was an attentive waiter at her side, his devotion was palpably matched by that of Roy Underwood. In the rivalry of these two Gertrude experienced the supreme happiness of a care-free woman. She was the prize for which these two men were strenuously striving. For her they were pitting their rival strengths; for the slight trifle of her smile they were bitter antagonists. The temptation to be hard and heartless assailed her, and she did not resist. She deliberately played the two men off against each other; and yet she was not merely callous in her design. Perhaps she was not sure yet which was the more worthy. It was possible that her heart asked for this strife, that her love yet

wavered uncertainly between the rival attributes of these strangely differing men.

King thought her this day perfectly heartless. It was unfair of her, callous and cruel. She had no right to so torture him. Roy delighted in the combat ; he felt prouder of her than ever before. That girl, impervious to assault, armoured in her splendid cold aloofness, was the woman to stir a man's admiration. She was a prize worth fighting for. How he would delight in the taming of her!

During the afternoon the hostess called for some man to take charge of a boat-full of girls. They had trooped into a roomy boat and declared their shrill intention of going fishing. To their hostess's declaration that a man should go with them they emphatically protested that they could take care of themselves.

But the hostess laughed them down. "I want a thorough sailor," she said; "I can't afford to have seven girls drowned in one day. Seven funerals are more than I'm capable of attending."

King politely pushed himself forward.

"No, King; you're no good!" she laughed, and the girls in the boat echoed the laugh.

"Why, he'd be no use even to steer. We can all row better than Mr Southern!"

"He doesn't know the difference between the rowlocks and the rudder!" cried another.

King retorted with a laughing sarcasm, and shrank back with a relief that was mixed with a tinge of pain.

"Ah, yes, Roy!" the hostess said with evident relief. "I'll send Roy Underwood with you. He'll take charge of you, and if even one of you is missing I'll hold him to account. If you capsize he'll have

to rescue you in rotation. You'd better draw lots for the right to be rescued first."

And King saw Roy Underwood depart for the boat. Roy was a doer of things, not a dreamer. He wished he had Roy's direct aim and his certainty of success. Roy aimed low, but he reached his mark. But another thought drove that envy from him: Gertrude was not in the boat.

He sought and found her. She was lying under the shade of a squat gum, pretending that she was asleep. The heat was intense. Her broad-brimmed picnic-hat lay upon her face, shading her eyes. In the negligent grace of her pose there was a fascination that set King's pulses madly throbbing. Then, as never before, he desired to win her, to hold her his own through life.

As she heard King's footsteps on the dry eucalyptus leaves, Gertrude opened her great eyes. But she did not stir. She was conscious that her attitude was not ungraceful. As King, in silence, stood looking down on her, she raised her eyes to him with a grave and serious intentness. In her heart was stirring a little pity for him. He loved her so—and she tormented him so serenely. He was so sensitive, so easy to hurt. It was the knowledge of her power that led her into the perilous ways of proving it. And yet he depended so upon her love. It was a shameful thing that she, liking him so much, could thus deliberately wound him. She felt a vague contrition deep in her heart.

Suddenly her expression changed. She had seen in King's eyes something from which she instinctively shrank. He meant to put her love to the test; and she was herself not sure! She hated action. Why could not he let things drift? But that was like men; they never were content with the promise

of the future; they wanted an immediate heaven.

"I want some afternoon tea—lots of it!" she said hastily, sitting up and putting both hands to her tumbled red-brown hair.

"The billy isn't boiling yet," he replied easily, though in his brain the insistent need he had to kiss her seemed to have taken all speech from him.

"Well, we'll go and see to it," she said with a defiance in her eyes behind which he saw a fear.

It was the fear that decided him. She rose to her feet and turned to pass him. He caught her by the arm.

"No, no!" he said, "not yet! I mean to speak to you, Gertrude."

She stood still beneath his grasp.

"Well?" she said, with a level look.

He accepted the defiance that her eyes implied. He kissed her despite her struggles.

"It is no use," he said vehemently. "You must marry me, Gertrude. You love me, I know. Say it! Say it!"

She lay quiet in his arms—a lax, white thing. Yet he could feel through all the limp, dragging body the heavy throbbing of her pulses.

She lay quiet. It was not worth struggling after all. She had so wanted to have a good careless time in the world; but there was always this somewhere in the dim background. She must marry at last. But it was too soon, and yet she felt that now she must face her future. This man held her at bay.

She drew herself away from his arms and stood aside, with downcast eyes. She liked King very much, and he loved her as she never imagined she would be loved. But so did Roy Underwood. But

at the thought of Roy a little line came, straight and firm, between her splendid brows. He was too masterful, too sure of himself, too sure of her. She would marry him only if he compelled her. And Gertrude was too proud of her individuality to submit herself so utterly to another personality, even to the personality of the man she loved. If she accepted Roy she would be his abject slave for life. He would master her, and she would submit, and slip gladly into that indolence of will that is the universal snare of the sex. It would be sweet to throw away with a splendid negligence that arrogant individuality in which she so openly rejoiced. But she could make such a surrender only if she greatly loved. And in the long glance she cast into the future she saw something that made her shudder. She was too assured of herself to take a place subservient, to let the love that dominated her heart dominate herself. It was necessary for her self-respect that she should marry a man who would not crush her individuality into a mere humble worship for him. Roy could force her into marrying him, for he was a strong man; but the surrender would be to herself contemptible. She was too arrogant to adore. She must be worshipped. Above her emotions, above her love, was throned her pride. Her individuality was to her more than her sex.

But already she felt herself submissive to Roy's impetuous will. Slowly, grimly, he was beating her femininity down. She woke in the nights in a great fear that at last she might be glad to submit; she trembled to think that in the time to come she might kiss the hand that held the whip. At such moments Gertrude steeled herself with a "Never!" that was the more emphatic in that it was so forced. She

cursed the femininity of her soul that could so betray her. God had not done fairly with her in making her a woman, in so weakening the fibre within her. Her sex was stealthily playing the traitor.

She looked up at King with a sudden clear glance that reflected a sudden clarifying of her doubts within her. He was not a strong man; there was no arrogant dominion to be feared here; he would always humbly adore. Here was her refuge—her refuge from Roy. She loved King with a love that was almost a pity; if she surrendered to him it was with a grace, a condescension. She could accept him as her master, making that little meaningless admission to his mere manhood with the usual feminine reservations.

And she loved King more than she loved Roy. Her love for King was a conscious, self-respecting thing; her love for Roy a submission that left her inarticulately protesting, vaguely ashamed and uneasy. Roy took her love as the right of a conqueror. She would be dragged through life in chains behind the chariot of his superb masculinity.

No; she could not bear that. And her love for King, freely given, and proud, was a finer thing than the abject love that was compelled by the superiority of Roy.

And King watched her debating with her heart. It was like her splendid sincerity to weigh his claims before giving her unalterable answer. Yet if, after all, this thing was not for him . . .? He scarce dared glance down that vista. He turned his eyes to hers, and in them was an appeal, humble, the worship of the slave for the goddess, the yearning of the unelect for the great things of this life.

Gertrude interpreted that glance. A wave of mother-pity whelmed her. She felt King's depend-

ence upon her love, his great and absorbing need of her. She could do so much for him, make his life so full, so splendid !

She moved blindly, unsteadily, towards him across the checkered shade of the clearing. Her eyes were bright behind their unshed tears.

Art was a small thing then. He saw Joy coming into his life with outstretched hands.

XXIV

THE swift Australian dusk was gathering as the steamer collected the picnic-party and turned homewards. There was a great quietness in the air, a great quietness in the hearts of the tired company. It had been a happy day, and more than one heart dreamed vague visions of the future as the steamer went silently past the darkening, sombre shores.

But Gertrude stood in the bow of the boat, excited and feverishly happy, with a reckless light in her eyes. She looked at Roy with a defiance that stirred all his desire for her. King was very quiet, sitting at her feet.

He had won this, at least, from life, and he was thankful and elate. But the reaction had come; his mind turned with a vague doubt to his pictures. The critics would have judged his work by now. What was the decision? Did the moonlight with its cynic gaze tell the truth, or was it all a mere morbid impression, the result of his continued depression and weariness? For on the following morning, when he had taken the covering from his great picture, the generous light of the early day had been kind to his work, and in a resurgence of hope he had told himself that the thing was "not half bad." Which is as highly as an artist student with an eye for his reputation as a critic will ever venture to appreciate his own work. But with whose eyes—those of the moonlight or those of his confidence in himself—

would the critics see his work? He remembered the criticism of his master, the silence that had followed his uncovering of the picture, and at last the enigmatical "Um-y-airs!" that might cover every phase of criticism from an awed admiration to a pitying surprise.

But behind all this questioning there lay a sense of glad triumph in his heart. The critics might damn his pictures; he would scarcely feel their dispraise. He had won a greater stake in life. He was more than an artist; he was a man—a man worthy of a wonderful woman's love. He was exalted with the thought of his manhood; for he, out of all the world, had won the love of Gertrude. Love had given him the accolade. He looked at that ignorant, swaggering, blindly cheerful Roy with a pleasant contempt.

It happened — as accidents always happen — so easily. Gertrude, with the new daring that was the outcome of her exalted mood, had climbed upon the railings at the bow and stood supporting herself by a steel wire stay. Roy, afraid of her losing her balance, cried out a sharp command to come down. She laughed tauntingly, with a delicious devilry in her sparkling eyes.

That look stirred Roy into action. "Then I'll hold you!" he said, and made a step towards her to catch her hand. She shrank away laughing, with her eyes challenging his, and raised her hand to beat him off.

King called apprehensively, "Come down!"

"No!" she gasped, laughingly. "If anybody wants me to step down he'll have to pull me down!"

She flashed her smile over the men beneath her. Roy and King started forward.

Roy was the nearer, the quicker. He swung himself up to her side and caught the girl by the wrist.

In that rude grasp the girl felt a sudden, appalling weakness. He was too strong for her. It was mean of him to humiliate her so. She would not be dragged down by any man. She turned appealing eyes upon King; he would—he had the right. . . .

But he had halted and was watching her. He made no move. He was afraid of the consequences of a struggle.

With an effort Gertrude wrenched her arm free from the detaining grasp. She lost her balance. Wildly she flung out her hand to clutch a rope. But it was only the halyard for a little flag at the bow, and broke as it felt her weight. She slipped over the side, with shut lips, into the gathering darkness.

Roy leapt upon the railings. A hand clutched his arm; he saw King's white face beneath. He jumped.

And immediately after him King leapt. He had seen a glimpse of white beneath the swirling water as he jumped. He came to the surface quickly and swam heavily towards that vanishing patch of helpless white. Upon the water a vague afterglow seemed to linger. He remembered, with a strange confusion of mind, that Gertrude could swim with ease, and wondered vaguely why she was not now swimming toward him. He was not a good swimmer himself, but he felt serenely conscious of rescuing her. A faint shouting came from the launch; he had not imagined how far away it had got. He swam on and on—it seemed for an interminable distance, over a drear, dark waste of water stretching to the edges of the world. Suddenly a white face appeared, as if conjured by some enchantment up to the surface of this illimitable waste. A current swirled it toward him; he clutched at the figure and knew it was Gertrude. She was unconscious; all the animation

had gone from her face. She hung limply upon him, weakly clutching him with unconscious arms. He felt strangely tired. He knew that he could not long support the weight of her body. Surely the people on the launch must have seen them? Why did they not come? It was growing very dark. He knew himself sinking slowly, slowly; yet he held that helpless figure fast. This was the end, then—to die ignominiously, haplessly, like a cast-off, useless thing. He had never imagined that death would come to him like that, so haphazardly, so unheroically. He had always thought that for him death would come with a stalking magnificence, a grim and terrible pomp. And here it was, with no ceremony, no concern—a mere prosaic, business-like sweeping aside of a life that stood in its way. It seemed pitiable, grotesquely undignified. Death, no longer a great and wonderful presence, came to him with a hardly-concealed smirk, in the guise of a matter-of-fact undertaker.

But he was dying with Gertrude. He had her close in his arms. Ah! death could not gainsay that! He had beaten death at the last. He had no bitterness now for death. It had all come right after all. Only there were his ambitions—his pictures. It seemed unfinished . . . an anti-climax . . .

He woke to fact—cruel, staring fact, within a moment. He was still on the launch, still with his hand on the rail, still about to leap. He had not moved. It had been all so easy to imagine; his mind had worked so swiftly, had pictured the sequence of events so vividly, that it was to him as if it had happened. But there was no salve for the bitterness of this awakening. He had not leapt. The artist-side of his brain had beguiled him with a pretty picture: the man in him had supinely shrunk

from action. He had not leapt. He was a coward.

And it was too late to go to her rescue now. There was nothing for him to do. He had failed. He was a coward.

The launch had stopped and was turning. Someone had thrown out a life-belt. In the darkness nothing could be seen of Roy or Gertrude.

As Gertrude slipped from the bow she instinctively threw herself further out, in a swift dread of the launch's propellor. As she came to the surface behind the boat she struggled to free herself from her skirt, whose clinging folds had already entangled her feet. She was not frightened, but wondered when the launch, which seemed so far off, would reach her. She felt herself able to keep afloat till it came—but it would have to come quickly. But it was a different thing swimming in the baths at Manly and struggling thus with a skirt cramping her movements. Besides, it was already very dark. She had more than once gone under. It seemed to her that a strange numbness, delightful and dreamy, was overcoming her. She wondered if she was drowning, and lazily decided that it did not greatly matter. Only it was mean of the people in the launch not to care. There was King—she had promised to marry King, she remembered; and instead, she was to drown. Why didn't King come?

Suddenly she felt a hand grasp her. Instantly her brain cleared of that growing lethargy. She was saved. It was King who had leapt so promptly to her rescue. She felt a great gratitude to God and to King.

A voice said, "It's all right now. I've got hold of you!"

It was Roy.

"Put your arms on my shoulders; that's right. Now don't struggle, just lie quiet. If you clutch me I'll strangle you, Gertrude, and we'll both drown. The launch will be here soon. That's right. Don't worry; you can't drown when I'm with you. But if you struggle I'll strangle you! So keep quiet!"

It was a masterful voice; but its very sternness seemed to the girl very sweet. She was safe in Roy's hands. He would most surely save her. And oh! what a splendid thing was strength! And it was a delicious thing to surrender, to lie passive within the shelter of his assured mastery of her. All her woman's soul went out to this strong man, this man who dared and did. She had found her mate. Everything came suddenly clear. She had trifled with King, had played at love. But this was more than love; this was life. It was foolish to further struggle. Only by a complete surrender could she ever reach satisfaction for her woman's heart. How she adored strength!

Her lips were very near his cheek. She kissed him.

The night had swiftly come. They were alone in the world, between a sea of water and a sea of darkness. He turned his head and looked into her eyes. The girl dropped her gaze before that compelling assurance of mastery. She submitted, she acknowledged her surrender. And there was no regret in her face. She clung to him the closer.

When the two were ignominiously pulled into the launch, dripping and nearly exhausted, the party on board experienced a great relief. A catastrophe had been averted. The shadow that had darkened their hearts suddenly disappeared. Everything was as before.

But in the glance that Gertrude gave King as she

reached the deck there was a new aloofness, a faint criticism that seemed to set him suddenly and terribly far off.

When she had been "rigged up" in various hastily-collected garments and had appeared on deck again, laughing and defiantly unashamed of her grotesque appearance and her dank, straight ruddy hair, King did not approach her. By an unspoken consent Roy was left to look after the girl he had rescued. And she did not appear to want any other companion. At Redfern, where the party separated on their diverse ways home, Roy assumed the right to accompany Gertrude, and King hastily went off with another party and took the first opportunity to be by himself.

He went home, and, as he was very tired and it was late, to bed. He felt miserable, contemptuous of himself. As he lay awake, for he could not sleep, his mind went over again and again the events of the day. He felt his manhood shamed; he was a failure in life—a proven coward. And he had lost Gertrude —he had lost Gertrude.

Of that he was terribly sure. After his failure to go to her assistance, when she was in peril of her life, she could never respect him again. And he had still a spark of pride; he did not want a love that was merely an unreasoning pity. He ardently craved her respect. And he had for ever forfeited his right to respect. And why? He asked himself with a slow insistence the grave question—Why? It had been a mere trick of his brain—a brain unaccustomed to swift decision. His was the dreamer's brain that imagines but cannot act. A lethargy of indecision held him ever hesitant before the sudden call of an emergency. He saw too far ahead to discern the immediate need for action. And yet,

with all his explanations, he was no nearer the cause of his inability to leap to her rescue. Perhaps therein lay the reason: his mind was too self-conscious; the functions that an ordinary brain performed instinctively he had to consciously reason out. And did that make him the less a man? He feared so: he was sure that it was so. His was the dreamer's brain that moves in a world unreal. It was with a grave reluctance that he stepped from it into the world of action. His was the delicate, self-wounding, piteous, self-manacled dreamer's brain.

So in life he had failed, after all. He was not worthy of a woman's love. He had not been able to make her his. What cursed flaw was in his nature that made him shrink from action? He had lost Gertrude. He knew that as well as if she had said so to him in biting, bitter words. The look in her eyes was enough. He had lost her.

He had no bitterness for the conqueror. Roy was a man, able and ready to prove his right. Roy was no waverer, no dallier. He knew his strength and used it ruthlessly. If in his might he swept another being from his path he wasted no time in compassion. It was the fortune of war, the invariable way of nature. Roy had won: the strong man must always win. He had no bitterness for Roy.

Again and again he said to himself through that hot night, "I have lost Gertrude!"

But at last—it was near the dawn—his brain cleared. There was his art. Life was not all failure: he had yet his work to do. He had his message for the world; until he had spoken it none could say that he had failed. After all, it was not for everyone to achieve happiness here; but, at least,

there was work to be done. He wondered whether that was the sole meaning of life—the performance of work, and the uplifting of soul that came from the satisfaction of work worthily done. Happiness seemed to him a haphazard thing. The happiest people he knew were the stupidest. They, with their lowly-tuned nervous organisations, were cheerfully unable to perceive the many discords of life. The more highly-organised spirits paid a terrible penalty for their sensitiveness. The happy people of the world had no ear for unhappiness. They did not rashly lift themselves above their environment. It was the daring spirits that climbed unattempted peaks who suffered. They soared—and fell. And the fall was the more terrible because of the height to which they had aspired.

But work was a nobler ideal than happiness; and it was work that drew him ever. He had tried to snatch happiness on the way; but it was not for him. Perhaps it was this lack of happiness that was necessary for the completion of his work. Since that other path of flowers was not for him, he would trudge the dreary path of duty with a serious and untroubled purpose. And at that thought he slept a little.

But when the dawn came in he woke again. To escape the iteration of his thoughts he rose and dressed, and went downstairs. He could not stay indoors. He wildly imagined himself going to Mosman's Bay and seeing if Gertrude was up. He would make a last appeal. But the grey light of the dawn serenely mocked him with the absurdity of such a mad freak. He had lost.

As he left his door the newspaper boy was delivering the morning papers. He took them and went out. He made his way briskly towards the

Domain. He wanted to be in the open air, away from this wilderness of houses. As he went through the Domain the poor outcasts of the city, the "dossers," were already slowly making their morning toilet. Tattered and disconsolate men, who had slept the night there wrapped in a few sheets of newspaper—which the Sydney "dosser" has found to be as warm as a blanket—were sleepily sitting up, putting their coats straight, tightening braces and buttoning gaping and dirty collars. One, an experienced "dosser," was carefully rolling up the big sheets of brown paper upon which he had slept. They would come in handy the next evening. Others were still stretched motionless, grotesque and stiff. It seemed to King as if he were stepping over a great battle-field, and he thought that it was in truth a battle-field of life. For these were the slain in the conflict of life; these were the stricken, the useless, the cast-aside. They, with the unknown handicaps upon them of a poor physique, a shifty mind, a weak chin, an unhealthy thirst, a recklessness of temperament, a dislike to control, even an ideal too delicate or too aloof for the comprehension of those who reached lower ideals—they, with all these handicaps, were fore-doomed to defeat in the battle of life. They had fallen, and life had passed them by. Once each must have had his stirrings of splendid impulse, once must have loyally loved some woman.

He found a seat on one of the benches beneath the avenue of fig trees, and idly opened one of the papers in his hands. It was the *Telegraph*. Anything would be better than thought.

The first thing his eye met was a critical notice of the work at the Society of Artists. He scanned it eagerly. His name was mentioned early. It was

a savage criticism, pitiless, contemptuous, bitter. The writer asserted that Mr Southern's work was worse than valueless; it was an impertinence, a danger, a menace.

"Mere cleverness run amok," "the bumptious superficiality of the art-student," "weakness of composition not disguised by a botched technique," "the banal masquerading as the *bizarre*"—these phrases seemed to his eyes printed in leaded type. He read on in terror. The moonlight had told the bare truth. He could not paint.

He opened the *Herald* mechanically. Perhaps that paper would approve. His name sprang from the column to his eyes. The *Herald* critic was not savage; the *Herald* would not demean itself by getting savage. But its faint scorn was almost worse than the fatal flippancy of the *Telegraph*. The critic began by apologising for dealing at such length with Mr Southern, but in the past he had betrayed distinct promise. He had put his fate to the test with a praiseworthy boldness by the huge canvases that he now submitted to the judgment of the critics. And in severe, heavy, sententious and sonorous phrases the critic—he was a youth and this was his first chance to display his turn for ponderous and oratorical phrase—went on to tell Mr Southern, politely and delicately, that he was no artist, that he should desert the palette for some easier and more self-respecting way of making a livelihood. The world could do without his pictures. There was more — references to technique put in to show the critic's newly-acquired encyclopædic knowledge of his craft—but King had seen enough.

Yes, it was all true. King knew it was true. Here was the expression in plain type of all the doubts that had gathered like evil ghosts about him,

the hesitations and despairs that had waylaid him and trapped him into depths of depression. His brother-artists would assent to that brutal verdict. It was all true.

A man, who had been lying like a slain soldier prone beneath a tree opposite him, slowly and drearily turned over, opened his amazed eyes, blinked lazily at the rising sun, groaned, and pulling his knees up suddenly sat up and looked around. Perhaps he had imagined for a moment after waking that his valet had knocked at the door, that he was being asked whether he was ready for his bath. But the reality aroused him. He noticed King upon the seat, saw the newspapers at his feet. He rose and slouched toward him, his tattered trousers flapping about his thin shins.

"Have you done with those papers, mate?" he asked.

"Yes," said King, wearily.

The man gathered the scattered sheets and sat down to read. His toilet could wait. Here was the news of the day. Here was news of England; perhaps he would see the name of Taunton, sleepy Taunton in Somerset, where he had been born, where his mother was now wondering, wondering what life had done with her darling son. Taunton and the good broad Somerset dialect! Ah! if ever he saw that old town again, if ever he heard the generous flow of that dear speech. . . . He eagerly scanned the cables.

King noticed him with a new interest. He had called him unquestioningly "Mate!" That was what that failure thought him—his mate. And that "dosser" in the Domain was right in stretching out so frankly the hand of companionship. He and King were upon the same plane—both failures.

It was characteristic of King that he accepted this mere newspaper judgment of his art. For it was but the expression of the fears that had so long mutely held him. The mere printed words had brought them to life. He knew that all his depressions, all his wearinesses, had been but the dim, inarticulate expression of his loss of belief in himself. That is what had happened. He had lost belief in himself. Once he could paint, he knew that. But that was when he believed in himself; it was his self-sureness only that had sustained him. His ideals were real to him; they had carried him on and on. He had hardly felt doubts or hesitations then. And now they were everywhere. He could not paint. His great—once he had thought God-given—talent had come to an end. He had forced it too far. It was a smaller talent than he had dreamed. He had not imagined that there were limits to any talent; and yet every gift that birth dowers a man with has its unvarying limit. Beyond its uttermost a man's talent may not go. His goal is fixed for him.

And now he would never be an artist. There was no recovery for him. It was no use deceiving himself. It had all been a great mistake, a long and weary mistake. He would have to retrace his steps—how far? And after . . .?

He rose and turned to return. The loss of Gertrude did not seem to him now so great a thing. He would never paint, never reach that glowing fame that had always hung rosy and delicate in the far sky, never know the supreme joy of the master.

He went slowly through the Domain. Most of the loafers lay there yet undisturbed. They were the unimpassioned failures of life; to them the great glory of the dawn was nothing. Life, all its splendours, all its happinesses, all its banalities, all

its despairs, rolled serenely over them, and they did not stir. They had long ago done with life ; they had passed beyond caring. And he, too, was one of them. One had called him " Mate."

What had life left for him now ?

As he entered his lodgings he met Miss Barbara Smith leaving for her work in the city. She carried her lunch in a string hand-bag.

" You're up early, Mr Southern," she smiled at him eagerly. " I've never seen you so early before. Really, you must be turning over a new leaf ! "

" Are you off to your work ? " he asked listlessly.

" Yes, off to work. Isn't it a glorious morning ? "

And she was gone.

XXV

Of the two months that followed King's recognition of his failure in his chosen work a discreet biographer would not usually speak. But as I am attempting to portray the manner of the man, it is necessary to indicate the extent of the flaw made in his individuality by his sudden failure of belief in himself. For King had—as will have already been abundantly clear—a weakness of fibre that, as long as his life went on evenly without stress, as long as he had not found himself out, did not disclose itself.

But with the avowal to himself of his complete failure as man and artist, the terrible consciousness of his weakness wrought strange disaster within that once arrogant personality. Life had found him out; he could not, even to himself, gloss over the weakness so startlingly obvious. And as it is the last stroke of the bushman's axe that sends the sturdy forest giant crashing prostrate, so this sudden, trivial illumination of himself as a failure sent King headlong to destruction. With the utter abandonment of hope that followed there stretched before him nothing but a desolate blankness. Life held for him nothing more. He had finished his trial; he would never get a second chance. It was too late now to make another start. Besides, what could he essay? He could not begin again, for he had lost that which made

aspiration possible—he had lost his belief in himself.

He was not bitter against life; but he blamed himself, utterly despaired of himself. What could there be ahead of a man who had only an ideal to buoy him up, and had seen that ideal suddenly and irretrievably snatched from his grasp? All his life had been a persistent striving towards that ideal. And his belief in his ability to reach that goal—his fervent assurance of his own worth—was the motor that had driven him on. And, after all, he was merely one of the utterly indistinguished! He laughed grimly at the humour of life that had dragged him so far and so carelessly flung him aside.

A stronger man would have accepted the verdict of life and set to work, doggedly, yet not hopelessly, to win a lesser yet still worthy verdict. Either he would refuse to believe that he was of no use to the world, or, recognising that his worth was indeed trivial, he would have gone bravely on to worthily fill the insignificant niche that Life, the humorist, had designed for him. That is the humiliating discovery life at thirty has for all of us. Perhaps, when we make that discovery, we have a sleepless night; but we shrug our shoulders—at thirty shoulders are easily shrugged—and our appetite does not fail us. Youthful ambitions are fine and delicately beautiful things, but there are more solid and enduring things than ideals—an income, for instance. So we go on earning our living and providing for our wives and children; and if sometimes, in a sentimental mood, we take out our youthful ambitions and turn them idly over in our memories, we do not weep over them. We light another cigar and contemplate its ash without bitterness. There is ash in every

cigar ; and one grows older. And so we relinquish the great and glowing hope that so long had lighted our lives, and hardly notice that something has faded, that the world has grown greyer. But with a clamorous family, with a growing business, with a more insistent world to consider, we come gratefully to the conclusion that ideals are inconvenient things to carry through middle age, and we shrug the facile shoulders of thirty and—light another cigar.

But King was not thirty. The loss of his conviction that he was a chosen spirit, this blank *impasse* into which life had led him, was as sudden a shock as the obliteration of the hope of immortality from a mortal's heart.

And, despised as he believed himself to be, despising himself, King reached that ebb of despondency known as the Region of Don't Care. Nothing mattered.

And Chance gave him the opportunity to prove triumphantly that nothing mattered.

Shunning the easy sympathy of his fellow-students, acknowledging no palliation of his palpable failure, he kept to himself, wrote no letters, saw no friends. It was impossible for him to write to inform his father of his failure ; hence he was compelled to make to his mother no mention of the wreck that had come to him. He wrote to her, indeed ; but he sent her no criticisms of his pictures. Of course she looked up the papers in the library, read them hotly indignant at their heartlessness—and said nothing to her son. She could not tell him that she knew ; but he was surprised at an almost incoherent letter from her in which she told him again and again of her unutterable belief in her clever son. King felt the generous and sympathetic phrases burn into his wounds with a keen agony. He was almost tempted to write

her the whole bitter truth. But he was not yet so weak.

He had met Gertrude only once, and her apparent happiness, veiled as it was by an unuttered sympathy for the critiques of his work, told him too plainly that she had promised herself to Roy.

Once or twice Barbara Smith ventured timorously to tempt him into talk upon his work, with the deliberate design of offering consolation; but the attempt was too obvious, her sympathy too near her lips, for him not to see through and avoid the kindly design. He was not going to have any women interfering, he said to himself hotly, and snubbed her.

So King went through his agony alone.

But crossing one day in the North Shore Ferry he noticed a dark-eyed girl whose pale, refined face, of a seraphic serenity, seemed vaguely familiar. His eyes sought her features at intervals during the crossing, his mind groping for a remembrance.

As she stepped upon the landing-stage at Circular Quay, however, she gave him a flash of her dark eyes. In her face he saw the faintest suspicion of a smile. Then King remembered. He had seen her on the ferry more than once before, had been attracted by those dark eyes, that strangely pure and refined, pallid face. He did not know whom she was. He did not care.

He overtook her in Pitt Street, and as he passed her, her eyes, turned aside, met his reflected in a panel mirror upon a shop front. Within that mirror their glances met in a faint smile. He did not care. He half paused and spoke to her. She seemed the least bit surprised, and flushed, but recovered herself with admirable self-control. Her self-poise conveyed a delicate flattery to him. She was astonished at his speaking to her, of course, but as he had done so she

would not be discourteous to him. Surely he had some reason for such an action.

In a few minutes they were chatting. She knew him well by sight, had often wondered whom he was; really, they were already old friends. She said it with such a confident smile that King believed her. Her name, it appeared, was Effie.

He looked up the street and saw Gertrude and Roy approaching. Then King knew he had reached the Region of Don't Care. Nothing mattered. He would show them! As they approached his attitude to Effie was one of long-standing familiarity. Effie did not resent it. He would show them!

That evening he met her by appointment. It appeared she was able to get out in the evenings. They took a tram to Rose Bay and went for a stroll. Within a quarter of an hour he was kissing Effie, and Effie showed merely a naïve surprise. Her sole fear, frequently expressed, was that some one might see. King reassured her; she was easily reassured.

When he put her on board the North Shore boat that evening King turned to walk home with a strange resurgence of belief within him. This girl at least believed in him, took him for a man. She liked him; judging from the grace of her surrender to his kisses, she liked him very much. The serene, unworldly face was a strange contradiction to her passionate nature. She was a girl who never stepped from the realm of emotion. Life without passion was a grey, hateful thing to her. She dreamed intoxicating dreams and was loth to wake. Perhaps she was not a "lady"; occasionally he had caught a slovenliness of speech, a trivial hesitancy of grammar, that betrayed the superficiality of her education; but her mind was quick and stimulating, her outlook joyously natural. True, she was a pagan in the world

of conventional morals. Love to her was an easy and impetuous thing. She did not know the necessity for restraint; if she loved, why hesitate to show her love? To love was the sweetest thing on earth—even sweeter than to be loved—and what was this life for if not to be loved and to love? Yes, King thought her a strangely fascinating character. She believed in him, took him without a question, accepted him with a naturalness, a lack of suspicion, that to King was a divine flattery. He went home rather surprised to find how much his estimation of himself had improved. He slept well, and in his dreams there was a girl. Curiously enough, she was Aroha, of whom he had not thought for many months.

He saw Effie very often. Almost every evening they met and went for walks, took the ferry boat to Mosman, Watson's Bay, Manly, climbed on the electric tramcars and explored the new lines that ran recklessly into the heart of the bush and stopped in the wilderness of eucalyptus waiting for a lusty suburb to spring to life about their termini. And gradually Effie, whom he had received into his life merely as an entertaining stranger, took a less nebulous position in his environment. Once, by chance, he had met her in King Street. He was with some artist acquaintances, and he looked the other way. She had been very nice about that little rudeness; he had apologised. Now he sometimes took her to tea at the A. B. C. She always dressed with an almost obtrusive quietness; the pallid, beautiful, pathetic face making, with the severity of her costume, an almost startling contrast. She looked a seraph in a tailor-made dress. Once when he and Effie were having tea at the A. B. C. he noticed Roy and Gertrude sitting at the neighbour-

ing table. He was very attentive to Effie that afternoon.

And slowly it came to him that Effie, who loved so swiftly and so facilely, was in love with him.

True, love was a simple and natural thing to her; she passed from one love to another with such a careless ease, and she surrendered to her dreams at the first hint of attack. For in her young life she had loved more than one. She told him she had been engaged three times. King said to himself, as men have said to themselves since all time, that her love for him was a richer, a deeper, a more sincere thing than had ever come to her before.

At times King found himself wondering whether he was not a cad. He was on the broad way. But he laughed—a little too boisterously. He did not care. The world had judged him once; he refused to let it judge him a second time. And he was very grateful for the warm, passionate love that Effie poured out on him. It rehabilitated him in his forgotten self-respect.

Effie did not deceive herself. She did not ask King to marry her. She did not want him to, though there were moments when she permitted an impossible future, rosy and respectable, to illumine her thoughts with its preposterous glow. But the present was very pleasant: why not let it go on—as long as it might? That was all the philosophy her twenty years of haphazard life had taught her.

Though King knew that to the world his life with her was an immoral one, to him there was little of immorality in it. He believed himself in love with Effie—as much in love as was possible to a failure such as he—and he thought Effie as much in love with him as her light heart allowed her to be. If there was vice in the life they led there was little

that appeared to him vicious in it. The matter was entirely between Effie and himself, and both had their eyes wide open. There was a certain *camaraderie* between the two that gave their attachment a justification ; they were good friends. They were playing a game, and knew it. As long as they played it fair to each other it was no concern of the world's.

And his art? King let that go. He wanted a rest from art. Afterwards — well, he would see. Meantime Effie was waiting for him, Effie with her impetuous ways, her entrancing, childish assumption of mastery over him, her genuine delight in his company, her unexpected revelations of a soul to which the emotions were a perpetual feast. How a little kindness of his would bring the glad light into those beautiful eyes! How a gift of roses would send through all her body a thrill of gratitude! How spontaneously, how naturally, she would reward him for a trivial attention with her ready lips! It was so easy to please her ; she asked so little to feed her love on. Fate had been very good to send into his life, when it was at its barrenest, such a joyous, spontaneous, vivid, pagan thing.

But in every game there are risks.

In those days he avoided Miss Barbara Smith. There was a swift sympathy in her eyes, indicated, too, by unobtrusive acts of kindness, from which he shrank. Effie did not think he needed sympathy: to her he was a god untrammelled. And after his fall from the pedestal on which he had so long reared himself, it was pleasant to come across, in the outer part of the temple, a worshipper who had herself raised a pedestal—smaller, perhaps, and not so firm—for him. Effie took him as he was, ignorant of his fall, incapable of appreciating his descent. But Miss

Smith had known him in the days of his splendour: he hated her. She had probably presumed to judge him; perhaps now she pitied him. How he hated her!

But one day she caught him unawares. He had taken a book out to the verandah after dinner, but it was soon too dark to read. Miss Smith drew a chair near his and began the attack. He was too tired to stir.

"And what are you going to do now?" was her question.

"Do? Do nothing, I suppose, except try to knock out some sort of a living at law."

"That's right." She nodded brightly. "I think you were just meant for the law. You'll be famous some day."

King was beginning to look ahead again. He felt within him that resurgence of hope that for ever marches in the train of despair. The tide cannot indefinitely ebb and ebb. And King was young, and a man.

After a pause Miss Barbara Smith began again, softly and hesitatingly.

"I think you have been very brave about—about your picture. You have not whined. I know I should not speak to you like this, but I—I've watched you so closely I feel I must just tell you what I think of it. Now, I know that if I had had such a disappointment I would just have gone to the bad. I wouldn't have cared. I wouldn't have considered whether I was hurting anybody else; I would have been done with everybody else; I would have forgotten everything but myself and the need I had to consider myself."

King had a whimsical mental picture of Miss Barbara Smith in revolt, Miss Barbara Smith going

to the bad. He wondered what her defiance of the world would amount to; he could rather imagine a rabbit defying a dog. And then the thought came that probably his revolt was as petty, as ineffectual as the simile he had called up to depict Miss Smith's defiance of the universe.

She went on, with a growing hesitation. "But you—you have remembered that . . . there were those who might care, who would be hurt if you were not brave. I want . . . to thank you—for that."

King turned his head quickly. There was a note of tears in her voice. Yet her face betrayed nothing.

"Barbara," he said quietly, "it's good of you to take all this interest in me. It is, really, but I don't deserve it. I'm not the strong man you think me; I've just drifted, drifted, and I'm drifting still. I do not care—I do not care at all—for what anybody thinks or wishes. I've got past that. I'm not bitter, but I feel it does not matter much—anything. I've just gone on anyhow. I've made no effort. I've come down off my pedestal, and I'm not used to the level ground; I've been too long cramped up on that pedestal. So you mustn't put a halo round my head; you mustn't turn the limelight on me, you mustn't."

Miss Barbara Smith turned her face away and her hand sought furtively for her pocket-handkerchief. Her brimming eyes must not disclose the traitor heart. A great yearning filled her with a pain that was almost a keen sweetness. He had called her by her name, and it was the first time that a man had even uttered its sound. She felt that it had a richness, a sonorousness, new to her conception of it. Women did not know how to pronounce it. She felt rather proud of her name. She swayed slightly: the world was a rosy mist.

"There—there are lots of people who are watching

you now," she forced herself to go on. "Perhaps there are angels watching you at this moment, waiting anxiously to see how you will bear yourself. You know, I feel that we all go through our lives almost unnoticed—by men or angels—till the time of stress comes, and then we find ourselves in the middle of the stage, and the great audience is watching us, anxiously intent on the slightest gesture we make, waiting with an awful interest to catch from our smallest instinctive movement the clue to our worth. And upon that little gesture, seen with such vivid clearness by every eye in that great sea of invisible presences, upon that little trivial, unconscious gesture, that vague audience, set far away from us in the terrible blank darkness of the theatre, criticise and doom us."

She broke off with an embarrassed laugh. "There, I've got on to a fancy of mine, the thought that somewhere out there in the dim blankness of the dark, somewhere in all that wide void of space, peopled by those vague, unimaginable presences, there are beings that are ever watching us, noting our least important gesture, hearing our slightest note of petulance, our lightest laugh, and remembering it, recording it for ever in their cosmic, indestructible, awful, passionless memories. It makes us more responsible to think that; it ought to make us more serious. Sometimes at night I look up and see a million aloof, passionless eyes keeping my petty hopes and trivial resolutions under their pitiless scrutiny. And somewhere in all that myriad gaze it seems to me there ought to be a vast and splendid pity, an overwhelming cosmic love. Only—of that cosmic love I am not quite sure. I cannot find it anywhere on earth. Darwin could not find it; and Nature does not seem to disclose it anywhere. So

far Nature seems only callous, only cruel, and without a trace of pity. All this struggle, all this conflict in Nature seems to be an excuse for us. We aren't much better than Nature; but after all, we have advanced a little along the road to pity and love. Nature has never heard of pity to the weaker, of love for the cast-off, of sympathy with the useless, of magnanimity to the vanquished in the struggle for existence. But we have improved on Nature; that seems to be our best excuse for existence. We have outgrown the limitations that Nature seems to find sufficient for the carrying on of her business; we venture to bring love and pity and sympathy—perhaps pity and sympathy are materialistically quite useless: possibly for the improvement of the race they are even harmless—and that seems to me to prove that we have some grandiose destiny ahead. Perhaps it is our stupendous task to tame and educate that hideously callous, strenuous, grim thing called Nature."

King looked at her in surprise. This pitiable little person dared to think, to dream, to speculate, to devise theories of the universe! She knew Darwin. It called to his mind the image of an ant impeaching the motives of the cosmos.

But Miss Smith came swiftly back from her dreams. "So I've been watching you," she concluded, "and I feel—I know that you'll come out all right."

A wave of pity went through the man. There was nothing ahead of this colourless girl who dared to speculate and dream. She was concerned in the affairs of creation, the splendid procession of evolution, the vast pageant of the future—and before her there lay only a little dreary, short path, leading nowhere. He had had his ideal; a momentous

hope had coloured his life; he had fought for his ideal and had been heavily overcome. Yet he had waged his war not ingloriously. Defeat did not matter very much after all; he had known the splendour of the struggle. But this girl had no vision of success, had been splendidly stirred by no aspiration. And yet she had gone on, gone on. That was her curse—and her glory.

She spoke again. "You know, I was almost glad to hear that you had given up art. It seemed to make you more of a man, more human, more like us. And I want to tell you again how proud I—how proud we are of you, how proud!"

She rose quickly and went inside the house. She could not trust her voice any longer. She went to her room, and I think she cried a little. I know that at last she knelt beside her bed and asked for help to bear this great and splendid cross of her love for him without a word, without flinching.

XXVI

It was with a keen dissatisfaction stirring within him that King went the following night to meet Effie. Miss Barbara Smith had wakened some repugnance to himself that left him irritable and restless. He had found that Effie meant much to him. The thought that he might break with her had, of course, often enough occurred to him; he had never intended such an acquaintance to be permanent. In the nature of things it could not be permanent. Neither Effie nor himself had ever shirked that certainty. Indeed, they had often alluded to it, only to shelve the thought of the inevitable parting as a thing unpleasant, far off, and assured, needless to be spoken of.

But Miss Smith had such absurd ideals about him. She should cease from that hero-worship at once. He would tell her about—about Effie. It was time that Miss Smith knew that—that he was just an ordinary, commonplace, unheroic man. Perhaps hardly that.

So he decided as he went toward the street corner where he usually met Effie. As he passed the post-office he noticed that he was a few minutes late. That had never happened before. He had always made it a point to be at the meeting-place before the time appointed; he did not like the idea of Effie waiting alone in the street for him. He hurried on, calling himself names for his lack of consideration.

She ran out to meet him from the little crowd at the street corner.

"Oh, I thought you were not coming, dear!" Then, almost petulantly, "Why were you so late? Why were you so late?"

King had never seen her angry before. Her lips trembled in a piteous petulance. He apologised quickly, and drawing her arm into his led her away.

"I was so frightened, standing there alone and waiting, waiting. And all the time I was wondering if you were coming, if you had forgotten, if you were never coming to meet me again."

This was another Effie. Before, she had always met him with a little laugh of utter happiness.

They went through the Domain toward Macquarie's Chair. As they entered the long fig-tree avenue that runs beside the Gardens, the hooting of the ferry steamers from the harbour reached them.

"There must be a fog coming up the harbour," said King. "The ferries are calling to each other already."

Where they were the night was dim and still, a thousand big stars cold in the sky. But as they turned toward the harbour they were met by creeping veils of mist faintly white among the shadows of the trees. They went on slowly, and soon the dim, clinging fog closed impalpably about them. As they moved along the familiar paths it seemed to King that they were venturing into unknown regions of lurking, mysterious terrors. Here and there the mist parted for a few minutes and the black trees stood out, heavy and flat, with a startling suddenness. Then silently the scarves of dim white wound, as it were, faint fingers about the world, and once again these two moved across a solitary, immeasurably lonely and desolate universe.

They came to their favourite seat and sat down, looking toward the harbour. The water's edge was just beneath them, but now a sea of vague silver lay about them and above them, secluding them from all the world. Beneath them, almost at their feet, they could hear the waves sulking among the unseen rocks. And across the harbour came again and again the sustained melancholy hooting of the blinded ferry-boats, groping across the unfamiliar water-ways. The steady beat of their paddles throbbed across the blank, clammy whiteness like the loud pulses of a sick man. A dull silver stain in the drear whiteness, like a moon behind a wet cloud, hinted at the unseen presence of a lamp. The heavy foliage of the fig-tree beneath which they sat cut black and solid into the pale radiance of the mist. Voices came vaguely from unguessed neighbourhoods, startlingly near.

King and Effie sat for a minute silent, almost awed by the strange unreality of the mist. Then in an instinct of protection he put his arm about her slight figure.

She shrank from his touch.

"No," she said softly, "you must not kiss me tonight, dear. I've been thinking since you saw me last, and it seems to me that you want me only to kiss. I don't think you like me at all except when you have me in your arms."

King stared. There had been nothing that Effie liked better than being kissed. When he met her in the street, where a kiss was not to be risked, her delicate, fragile hands had a way of hovering about him till they took his hand in their tendril clasp. It was the mere touch of him that she was impatient for. And one night, out of the mere delight of anticipating her kiss, he had made no motion to lift

her lips to his, till at last, stung into a swift impatience by his dallying, she had put her arms about his neck and drawn him to her.

Indeed, this was a new Effie. She did not want his kiss.

"I want you to be very, very good to-night, King," she said. "I would just like to sit here and talk and listen, like old friends. Please do not kiss me to-night. Please be very, very good."

And in this speech King's keen ear noticed something. She had a way of mispronouncing certain words that, in a land where dialects are rare, seemed quaint and piquant. In particular she had a peculiar furry pronounciation of the word "very," calling it "vurry," that was the inherited remnant of some English dialect. And now he noticed twice that she put a prim and affected emphasis upon the word. He missed the rich, warm pronunciation, and laughed at her about it.

She took him up with a new seriousness. "Yes," she said, "I've been trying to speak better, dear. I often feel that I'm so much beneath you in—everything. So I've been trying to be more careful in the way I speak. You know I'm not a lady, and I notice the way you say some words; there are some words you use that I've never heard before. And I would like to talk like you do; and so—it's very silly of Effie, but she's got so little to do—so I've been trying to improve my pronunciation." (She pronounced it "pron*ow*nciation.") "And I've been at work on my writing. I got a 'Letter-writer' and a copy-book, and I've been trying to improve my hand-writing. Didn't you notice the improvement in my last letter? I was hoping you would notice it and ask me about it."

Effie's writing was thin and quavering, the mark

of a hand that took to the pen awkwardly and on rare and important occasions. King always felt, when he received her spasmodic, impetuous scrawls, that they had, nevertheless been the work of a laborious hour. When with a hairpin she prized the cork out of the penny ink-pot he felt that she knew herself about to perform a momentous ceremony.

"But why?" asked King, with a little laugh. "Why do you take all that trouble? I like your writing as it is, and I often laugh over the way you spell some words, and I love to hear the funny way you sometimes pronounce. Your voice is so rich and liquid that it seems to give the words a new meaning. Often I catch myself remembering the way you say certain words, and I would miss them if you pronounced them the ordinary way. I don't want you to change, please. It seems to make you just like anybody else. It isn't my Effie any more."

She flared up into a little gust of passion. "Yes, you laugh at me—at my ways—at my ignorance. You're so much above me, I know. But you started so much above me. It isn't fair to look down on me so. It's not . . . nice to me, King. I do try not to disgrace you. I'm sure from my dress, and the way I walk, nobody would know I wasn't a lady. And I do want to be more your equal, dear. I don't want you to be ashamed of me—oh, yes, you are ashamed of me sometimes, King; I've seen it, though you are a dear boy and try not to let me see. But I've seen you flush up sometimes at something I've said to you when other people might hear—those hateful, supercilious women whom you know and who look down on me and wonder who I am. They're ladies, and it comes easy to them to speak properly and not forget themselves. And all the time I've got to be on my

guard, watching to see I don't forget. Oh, yes, I've seen you ashamed of me, King. Sometimes when I meet you in the street—and, dear, if you only knew how I want to see you every day you wouldn't wonder at me so often being in Pitt Street near your office. I don't want to take you from your own friends, King; but sometimes I've seen you wish you hadn't seen me, and you look past me when you raise your hat. A woman can always see these things; and, dearest, I want you so that perhaps my eyes are keener than other women's."

King glanced furtively at her, startled by the intensity of feeling in her voice. Did she care for him so much as that?

And suddenly he noticed that the grey mist had come very close about them. All the world was a dull vagueness. Even the overhanging leaves of the tree hung vague and dim before him—a darker blur on the pervading greyness. It seemed to him that this insidious, shrouded mystery that had so silently crept upon them was something sinister, callous, horrible. Within this phantom greyness he felt his foothold slipping beneath him. He was losing touch with reality. The grey mist wound vague arms about him, bound his soul with clinging scarves of horror. Where was he? What was he doing? What had eaten away his robust self, what horror was rotting his soul?

He gripped the iron side of the seat with an uncertain hand and forced himself back to sanity by the help of the safe assurance that grasp gave him. He was on a solid earth, after all. And at his side was a pretty girl called Effie, whose pallid face of the perfect purity of a nun he had kissed so often. He sank back silent and reassured.

And Effie, too, was silent. About her the mist

was gathering, and in her heart was gathering a vague pain. During that waiting at the street corner for King she had learnt something. She had been startled by a sudden suspicion that perhaps he was not coming, that perhaps he would never come again. The pain of that thought had wakened her to a recognition that life without him would be a terrible and lonely place. She had not imagined that she loved him so much. She was utterly startled to see how much. The thought that after all he might go away from her, leave her—alone—to begin again, find some other man . . .

"King, do you love me?" she said quietly.

"Yes, of course, Effie."

"But how much?"

"This much," he answered readily, and tried to kiss her.

But she would not. "No; I want to be sure," she said.

"Well, I love you very much. You and I are very good—friends, aren't we?" King stirred uneasily. Effie seemed strangely insistent. The mist seemed to come closer, threateningly, its blind eyes shadowing an implacable menace. He wanted to shriek, cry out against this impending—what?

"King," she began again, after a pause, "do you think you love me enough to . . . to marry me?"

Ah, now he knew. The terror had taken shape. He felt almost relieved.

She saw the sudden move of his body and went on in a torrent of words. "I don't mean now, dear; not now. But say in three—five years' time. I could educate myself to be your wife. I could make you a good wife, dear. I've been true to you—you know I have—ever since the first day I met you. I've met any amount of men, but they were none of

them like you. And I know you have never met a woman who could love you like I do. Haven't I shown that? And, King, God knows I've not been—not lived like other women live—but love comes so easily to me, and my mother was horrid to me, and I was so young and—how could I know? And my heart is so thirsty to be loved that it seems impossible for me to be stern, and till you came I did not care much who loved me so long as I was loved; and then you came and—it was all different. It seems to me that now I understand. I didn't understand what love was before. I've been going through life thinking I saw everything, and all the time I've been blind in a place of great light. And now the bandages have been taken from my eyes, and it all seems wonderful and glowing and splendid —I did not know that love was like this. You see, I had let other people love me: I had not loved. And now, dear, all my heart yearns to change this life. I want, oh, how I want! to be good! And I could be good for always. It would be so easy to be good—with you, now that I love you. I never understood before how easy it is for married women to be good. It comes so easy, I see, now, when they are in love. They could not be anything else. It is because they love. And I would not shame you, King; you know I would not shame you. I would educate myself. You don't know how hard I would work. I would go to school again. I have a mother in Brisbane; she was horrid to me, and I ran away from home. But I would go back to her and live with her. She would be glad to have me back. She has written three times. I'm very quick at picking up things, dearest, and I would never disgrace you. I've been thinking and thinking about all this. And if it was for you I would not take long educating myself. I

would go to a school. Won't you take me into your life, King? Won't you lift me up into your ways? I could be such a true wife to you, and—you do love me, dearest, don't you?"

She ended, turning an imploring face to him. The delicate grace of her attitude forced itself upon his consciousness even at that moment. She was always so graceful, so pretty in her unpremeditated movements. But he turned his face away from her, staring with unseeing eyes into the blankness of the mist. So she was taking the delicious game seriously. And so she had begun to feel and suffer too. Well, he had suffered with Gertrude. One of the two must always suffer. She had to learn that lesson, as he had had to learn it. It was part of the universal education called Life.

But marry her? The thing was impossible. How impossible she could not guess. She was incapable of estimating the width of the chasm separating the two. Yet was there such a difference — any difference at all?

Yet, what could he do? Morally she had some claim on him, a great claim on him, the greatest of all moral claims. And now she appealed to him to save her from that life he had helped her to lead. And for himself surely the sacrifice was very small. He had abdicated from the world; its decisions, its criticisms did not matter to him any more. His actions concerned nobody but himself—and Effie. And she did love him, more than any woman had loved him in his life before. With all her looseness of moral character, with all her fundamental commonness, she loved him. And her love, by its great sincerity, triumphed over the love of better women. Like one other, much would be forgiven her. And she could make him happy—if he did not demand

too much. And was he justified in demanding much, in demanding anything? No; he must be content now with what life had left for him. Why should he not marry Effie? She talked of his lifting her to his level! She, too, put him on the inevitable pedestal. How he hated pedestals now! No; there need be no condescension; there was no chasm between them. He hoped he was worthy of her great love. He felt that whatever Effie had been this love of hers was without alloy. It transported her to regions of dim purity.

Yes, he would marry Effie, flout the world, make her, the outcast of the world, happy. She had been so sinned against, and by men such as he! He would make some reparation, clutch her from that dark gulf. A great wave of pity went through him as he turned and looked at the girl. She asked so little, and he could do so much. Yes, he would marry Effie. It was all the honour he had left in him.

"Effie," he said, "if you'll have me, I'll marry you. I'm not much of a man, but if you'll have me, I'll marry you."

It was not a fine speech. There was more pity than love in it.

"Oh, King!" she said softly and gladly, and put her arms about his neck. "You love me, then? I dreamed of it, but I did not know; I thought you were like the rest, that you only talked. And I will make you a good wife. I swear I will. God bless you, darling! God bless you!"

She ended in weak tears.

And King, holding that sobbing, tremulous little girl in his protecting arms, felt a great gladness within him. Here, at least, was a use he could be to the world. Here was a task, a duty near at

hand and obvious. Life had made him responsible for Effie. He was almost grateful to life. And—for he was young—he could not help a feeling that he had behaved well. In a vague way he felt that he was a hero.

And then he grew conscious that the world had widened out. The mist had stealthily, insidiously withdrawn. The little world within which he and the girl had seemed to be so isolated had expanded, disclosing wider vistas beyond. The mist wreaths drifted back, lost themselves in the grass, dissolved within the heavy mass of the foliage. Another black tree stood sharply up from the grey nothingness, like a black picture suddenly projected upon a grey screen. Another tree followed it out of the mist; the gas-lamp took on sudden shape, meagre and straight; other lights sprang out across the water. The world swiftly widened. He noticed a man and a woman sitting on a bench not ten yards away. They must have been there all the time. And it had seemed to him that they, he and this poor stray soul, had been immeasurably distant from all the living world! And still the scarves of mist, like torpid snakes, writhed dimly further and further away. The earth was disclosing itself. It seemed to King that he was watching that first command of the Creator. Out of impalpable chaos, with vague, confused struggle and striving, form was slowly emerging. His heart was immeasurably gladdened. He felt for the soul beside him a wonderful and momentous pity.

"How good you are to me, King!" Effie was saying weakly. "I swear you'll never regret it. I'll be a good wife. God bless you, King, God bless you!"

His quick ear noted the banality of the repeated

phrase. He was hurt, offended by the commonness.

And in a lightning flash he saw the sacrifice he was making. For, despite his splendid heroics, it was a sacrifice. He knew he had ruined himself, he had delivered himself into the hands of fate. Up till now the way back to life was still open to him; the door was not immutably closed. But this marriage with Effie would end his nagging ambitions. He would have to devote himself to winning an income to set up housekeeping with her. He must marry her at once. This life could not go on any longer. That was his immediate plain duty to Effie. It was not her fault that she had played the game seriously. She was no scheming woman. He felt sure that he was the only man she had ever asked to marry her. She was genuinely in love with him. And he? Now he saw that he did not love her that way. She could not satisfy the best part of him. Between their minds, between their modes of outlook, there was a chasm, terrible in its hopelessness, implacable in its grim reality. Yet that was part of his task, to shut his eyes to that chasm. Then, as he took her, pityingly, into his arms again, he thought of Miss Barbara Smith. She would not allow him to do this thing, even though she would have admitted that his honour dictated it. He remembered how little sympathy she had been able to show to the Anæmic Niece. So he must not tell her till it was too late for her to interfere. And his mother and father? They would be disappointed, of course; but this was his own affair.

Effie lay in his arms in a moveless content. She knew herself safe for ever in that strong grasp, safe from the world, safe from the grim future towards which sometimes she gave a brief, shrinking, terrified

glance. She did not dare look forward. But now from the shelter of King's love she could contemplate that vague terror with serene eyes. She was safe at last. A great, almost filial, gratitude welled up in her impulsive heart for this strong, splendid, conquering, pitying man.

And now, as they sat silent, gazing out across the dim night, suddenly they noticed that the mist was inscrutably closing in upon them again. The blind dimness crept closer; the long, vaguely-stirring arms of the mist insinuated their delicate grey fingers nearer and nearer, winding about the trees and creeping along the wet grass with a horrible suggestion of sinister life. The walls of greyness grew heavier, draping, as with successive curtains, the world of vision. As the trees slowly melted into the prevailing blankness, as the gas-lamp lost shape and became a mere luminous stain in the dim greyness, as the stars of light across the water spread into vague blurs and dispersed, King felt that he was retreating into a world where there were no senses. Creation was dissolving before his eyes. All merged sullenly into an impalpable, space-pervading greyness. The damp, winding arms of the mist, grown arrogant, put clammy fingers at his throat.

"You know," Effie said, after a long sigh of exquisite content, "if you hadn't said you'd marry me I don't know what I would have done. If you left me now I would not care for anything. I would give up every hope. I would just go on, go on. . . . You have saved me from so much—from that!" She thrust her hand out against the enveloping mist and shuddered. "I would have just gone drifting down—drifting down. . . . And now—"

She laid her cheek close to his, and the two gazed, long silent, into that dim, sightless face of the grey

mist that stared blindly and passionlessly back at them—these two helpless, clinging things caught in the grip of unimaginable forces, looking bravely out into the vague, awful face of space, seeking, with a human haplessness, to find some recognition, some glimmer of human sympathy in the vague immensity of its features—imperturbable, pitiless, dead.

And from behind that blank visage came, like a menace, the long hooting of the ferry boats, the throbbing of unseen paddle-wheels that heavily pulsed and pulsed like the enormous laboured beating of some vast and inconceivable heart.

XXVII

EFFIE and King had arranged to meet the next evening at their usual corner. Remembering his lateness of the previous evening, King was early at the tryst. During that day he had not thought much. He felt strangely dull and tired. He accepted his position in a lulling apathy for which he was thankful.

But now, as he waited in the grey of the dusk, he saw, in all its desolate bleakness, the sacrifice that he was about to make. That day he had avoided Miss Barbara Smith's eyes. In the future he would have to avoid other eyes. Yet he hugged to himself the comfort of Effie's love for him. She had been the means of dragging him out of the depths of his despondency, and he was grateful to her. Now he felt a man; there was the future to work for—his and Effie's. He had shaken off his despair; there was dear, commonplace, doubt-lulling work to do. It was something, he felt, to have won Effie's whole-hearted love.

But she was late this time. He strained his eyes across the gathering darkness. He saw her coming in every woman's figure; but the faces he peered at passed unrecognising. He waited wondering, and watched the slow hand of the post-office clock crawl deliberately round the face. And she did not come. He stood there for an hour. Possibilities of accident or illness flashed across his mind, and he felt the

intolerable agony of the thought that he must wait till the morrow to find out what had kept her. For now it was half-past nine and he knew she would not come that night. Yet he could not refrain from strolling down the street as if to meet her, never venturing far from the corner in case she might have reached it by another way. But she was not awaiting him beneath the lamp when he returned. At last, despairing, he went home.

There was no letter for him next morning. Perplexed, he went at lunch-time to her lodgings. She had left the day before, leaving no address. Was the landlady quite sure she left no address?

"Yes, the laidy was very perticler about that. She said perticler that if any letters came for 'er 'ere, they wasn't to be forwarded nowhere. Told me to burn 'em."

He turned away, wondering. He looked for her in the streets that afternoon, and was night after night, for a fortnight, at the corner where they used to meet. But she never came. He never saw her again. She had gone inexplicably out of his life, leaving no trace. He did not know any address that would find her. For a long time he woke every morning with the confidence that there would be a letter from her. None came.

What had prompted her sudden disappearance he never knew. He wondered whether her keenly intuitive, sensitive soul had divined beneath the show of love he had made her its poor pretence. He did not love her as she craved to be loved. Perhaps, in the clear morning light, she had vaguely seen the sacrifice he was prepared to make for her. That she still loved him he was sure. And he loved her now with another love that had grown up in his new loneliness. He saw the dim striving of that clouded,

common soul to pierce its way up to the vaguely-divined light. He felt that if one's handicap is taken into account no one on earth could judge Effie. And he knew that a part had been taken from himself. That trust of her soul given into his hands had been rudely taken from him; he was not great enough to undertake it. And slowly he came to the conclusion that Effie, in one swift moment of blinding insight, had seen the sacrifice he was prepared to make, seen or imagined the drag she would be on him, and resolved to relinquish the greatest thing in her world for his sake—for the sake of her great love. But even he, with all his passionate sympathy, was unable to divine the grandeur of the sacrifice she had made. And a certain text came into his mind—"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

And whether she had gone up or down in the welter of life, whether her heart, with its fatal ease of loving, with its insatiable appetite for love, had led her down into the depths of life, or lifted her to the heights of renunciation he never knew. But he feared. . . . And yet he knew that wherever Effie was, her heart was warmed by the rich glow of that splendid renunciation. She could not utterly sink while in her heart she nursed that great memory. But often in his life, often through the long years, the thought came to him, "She is living somewhere now, perhaps near me, lost in the wide smother of the world, wondering, perhaps, about me, perhaps having altogether forgotten me, forgotten that once she so loved me as to cast her soul for me into hell. That would be the most terrible thing of all. And I am ultimately responsible. I threw away my trust." And then the quiet hope would come to him, "Perhaps she is dead." He never knew.

In the months that followed he found himself, to his surprise, taking a keen interest in his legal work. His manager increased his salary and began to entrust to him more responsible work. Once he said to King, "I hear you've given up painting. That's encouraging, most promising. Persevere at your work and we'll see you somewhere yet."

But King's interest in his work was due more to his growing dissatisfaction with Australia than to a delight in the practice of the law. The long heat of the summer, the warm, moist atmosphere of the city, the unvarying brilliance of the sun, began to press upon him. Unconsciously he was finding out that he was not an Australian. His thoughts began more and more frequently to stray back to the land he had left.

One afternoon King had gone into one of the many underground tea-shops of Sydney to escape from the pervading heat. He sat at a marble-topped table and ordered the national lemon-squash. As he sat drinking and negligently considering the possibility of a water-ice, a vast individual lurched across the room and held out to King a huge, red hand. King looked at him in surprise. His first impression was that the man was appallingly new. His clothes shone with newness, his straw hat was startlingly white and stiff, his tie seemed to mourn the shop-window from which it had so recently been ravished, the creases in his trousers threatened to split if the wearer bent his legs, and his vividly chrome boots seemed to crackle with their first gloss. The beard he wore stood solid and spruce like the fleece of a newly-sheared sheep.

"You don't remember me, Mr Southern?"

King recognised the voice. This was John, the ploughman of Westella run. But why the plough-

man in Sydney, and why such a prosperous John?

"You wonder, maybe, why I'm so swell?" said John, heavily sitting. "Well, I'm rich; not a millionaire, of course; but I've got enough to—Not heard o' me? Well, I am surprised. I thort everybody knew. At the Metropole, where I'm puttin' up, they points me out to strangers. I thort every bloke in Australiar had heard of me! Didn't you see it in orl the papers?"

He paused for the rhetorical effect. Then, raising his voice, and with a glance that included the other people in the room, he delivered this stupendous announcement.

"I'm Tattersall's sweep. First prize on the Melbourne Cup!"

There was a stir at every table. Women and men turned and stared at him. John nonchalantly preened himself.

King remembered John's devotion to the gigantic lotteries known throughout Australia and New Zealand as Tattersall's Sweeps. These sweeps are held upon every important race in the continent, and the prizes run up to thousands of pounds. On the Melbourne Cup, John, holding a ten-shilling ticket, had won three thousand pounds. For years he had poured his wages into this huge lottery, sometimes drawing a small prize, the proceeds of which he immediately invested in more tickets, only to see them drawn once more into this great whirlpool of speculation. But with the true gambler's instinct he had continued his investment in these perilously uncertain tickets, and now he had drawn the greatest prize in the sweep. He felt in some way that he had deserved it. In his mind there was a growing belief that in some way his personality

had influenced that marble with the number of his ticket upon it to insinuate itself into the child's hand that drew it from the barrel.

His immediate act on receipt of this news was to relinquish his position as ploughman at Westella. He had determined to see the world, and for a Maorilander the world is Sydney and Melbourne. But before leaving Westella he had been careful to stipulate that his place as ploughman should be only temporarily filled. Some day, he remarked, he might like to come back. Meantime, he would have a Gargantuan spree, whose dazzling recklessness would send his name, already famous, flashing across Australasia with the brilliance of a meteor. He would show them how a man should spend his money!

This was his first week in Sydney, and already the delight of spending money was beginning to pall. He was feeling somewhat lonely and afraid in this big, careless city. His joy at meeting a friendly face was enormous, and took the immediate practical form of ordering two lemon squashes.

John was brimming with the stupendous recital of his adventures in Sydney, and King let him run on, laughingly interested. But the man brought with him a memory of New Zealand that seemed to bring comfort to a vague pain. His bronzed bigness, his robust health, his cheery optimism, his fund of suppressed energy, seemed like a cool breeze in the sultry city. Suddenly an intense longing for his own country overcame King. He knew then what his soul had been inarticulately craving. It was a breeze. He wanted the keen breath of the ocean wind upon his cheek; in this city of high, stifling, narrow streets the very air was stagnant. He was a stranger here—a New Zealander. In a moment he saw his island home; his mind raced across that

waste of the heaving Pacific; he saw the rocky islets stand stiffly up from a foam of white; he saw the ragged coast rise sharply into the clear air; he felt the whip of the wind lift his hair from his forehead; the bitter rain stung his face, and he shivered. Pungent and swift to his nostrils came the moist scent of the bush. That was where he lived, where he should be; and—the thought almost made him reel, so vivid it was—there he could paint again! It was not all over yet. Once back in that cool, crisp air, once enveloped by the strenuous ozone of his islands, and he would feel again the returning waves of inspiration, of hope. He was not alive here; but in four days he could be in another world. He thrilled with the suddenness of it. The door was not shut in his face for ever. An angel was fumbling at the latch.

John was telling him of the run. There had been changes. Mrs Grey had died a year ago.

Mrs Grey dead! And he did not know! King was startled, shocked. Then his thought leapt to Aroha. How utterly he had forgotten Aroha!

He named her with a sudden cold at his heart, as if he would learn that she, too . . . "How is she?" he said quickly.

"Just the same."

King became aware that he had been holding his breath for John's answer.

"Not married?" he said, wondering. "Isn't she married?"

"No; nor likely to be. She's got too much to do with managing the run. It's all in her hands now; she won't have a manager. And she's making it pay, too. Frozen mutton is going up. It's a splendid property now, run as she runs it."

"And has she changed—changed in appearance?"

John considered. "Well, I never exactly noticed. You see, livin' on the run and seein' her every day like, it isn't likely I'd notice. But there was a chap who saw 'er before I came inter my fortune, and 'e 'adn't seen 'er for years, and 'e told me she was altogether changed, grown older, more lines come on 'er face, got thinner, too. Well, though I can't say as 'ow I've noticed it, you can't live through trouble without it markin' you. And—let me see 'ow many years it is since you was at Westella—gettin' on for six, ain't it? Well, six years is bound to tell on a woman as 'as trouble."

He paused as if digesting the philosophy he had enunciated. Then, apparently satisfied that he had not committed himself to any sentiment to which he was not prepared to stand, he went on,—

"I often thinks she's working too 'ard like. Workin' 'erself to death. What's she want to graft like that for? She's makin' money. I don't see no good in workin' when you've got money—like me. Spend it, I say, have a good spree, and then take up yer graft agen, like an honest man, till you gets enough to 'ave another spree. That's what I'm doin' with these 'ere thousands of mine. I reckon it'll take me a year to go through 'em all, and then I'll go back to Westella again. She's keeping my place open fer me. I can always earn good wages ploughin'. 'Marry,' says some. Not me. I've known good men lose good places owin' to their wives. My ploughin' won't quarrel an' nag at me. A wife might. Not me!"

King hardly heard him. Aroha had grown older. It was strange that he had never thought of that. In his mind she was still the girl he had left—the girl with the eyebrows that met with an upward ripple, the girl with the rich laugh and the supple, slim figure.

She had grown older! That meant that lines had come into her face, that worry had made her thin, that she was wearied with work. She had seemed a thing made for happiness, and she had become a galley-slave! She worked too hard. Why?

He asked John the question.

"I suppose it's because of 'er tryin' to forget," he said slowly. "When a woman tries to forget she tries to kill herself. Seems to me as women are made up of nothin' but memories. They broods so on 'em that their memories grows into themselves, and to try an' forget is as 'ard as to cut a piece out of their 'earts. And Miss Aroha's tryin' to forget."

Forget? No; surely she had long ago forgotten? As he had forgotten her. When his mind recurred to those glorious days in that sea of tussock land, he was conscious of scarcely one regret. It had all been delightful; but it was a fading dream, impossible to recall. Of late, he had once or twice determined to write to her; but on sitting down, with the blank paper in front of him, he had been unable to find the sentence that would connect two such distinct destinies, that would join two paths that had separated so long ago. But now Aroha had grown older. Somehow that seemed to bring her nearer to him. She had not lingered at the parting of the ways. She had trudged on, she had known the bitternesses of life. Perhaps her path had not been so widely separated from his, after all. Perhaps, even now, she was not far from him. Perhaps they two had, at short intervals, travelled the same hard road?

And she had not forgotten! She had been truer to him than he to her. She remembered. Perhaps, as John had said, women were all compact of memory. Perhaps she lived yet in that past from

which he had so brutally and wantonly gone. A wave of keen egotistical gladness went through him. He would go back to her, see her again, take up the dream where he had laid it down. . . .

"Yes," John was droning on, sucking his lemon-squash through his straw with a deliberate relish. "Yes; he was a brute that man, treatin' 'er so, he was!"

"Who?" asked King, abruptly.

"The bloke I'm tellin' you of—the bloke she's tryin' to forget. She was in love with 'im all right, and 'e—well, 'e was just amusin' himself. But I give 'im somethink to be amused at before I'd done with 'im, I did!"

A dim recollection seemed to vaguely amuse him. He rumbled with inward mirth.

King heard him with a dull pain growing within his heart. She had forgotten him, after all, had fallen in love with another man! There was something disconcerting in the thought of an Aroha who could love another man. She seemed to have defiled herself. Was it the same Aroha, the Aroha who had loved him? Another man!— Ah! but she had grown older!

"Tell me—his name—who?"

John ruminated. "'E was a bloke named Colley—oh! a 'igh-toned bloke 'e was! Son of a big merchant-cove in Australiar, and 'e was up to Mataura on a 'oliday when 'e saw 'er. 'E got to ridin' over to see 'er—'er mother was alive then—and she seemed to like 'im, and they got friends like. They 'ad arranged to get married, and 'e went away to Dunedin to fix things up. Then one day 'is father arrived unexpected at the 'omestead, and there was rows. 'E'd come all the way from Sydney to stop 'is son makin' a blamed fool of 'isself, 'e said—and 'e looked the sort of bloke as usually gets 'is way, too.

'E wasn't goin' to let 'is son, who was 'is heir, to throw 'isself away on a country girl like Miss Aroha—'er with Maori blood in 'er, too—and 'e bein' an Australian thoart as 'ow Maories was niggers. So 'e stormed and stormed, and Aroha said as 'ow she wouldn't give him up, not she, 'cos they loved each other, and it was no use 'is torkin'. Then the old cove rode away, and that girl went about the run as praud as a queen. But one day a letter came from the bloke she was in love with, sayin' that 'is father was that angry with 'im for wantin' to marry 'er that he was goin' to chuck 'im out without a blooming penny. And so he found 'e 'ad made a mistake, and would she be so kind as to release 'im? And she went about for a week like a ewe that 'ad lost 'er lamb, waitin', she seemed to me, for the bloke to come to 'er and say 'e never meant to write no such letter. But 'e never wrote, nor nothink. Of course, I got to hear all about it, and when she asked me to take a letter addressed to 'im to the post—I was ridin' in to Mataura—and I saw that it was addressed to Dunedin, I made up my mind that I'd just deliver that there letter myself. So I took the train to Dunedin, and I called on the bloke. I 'anded in the letter and said that I'd wait for an answer. And when 'e said, 'There ain't no answer,' I ups and says, 'It's my opinion as how you've been guilty of conduct as is unbecomin' to a gent!'

"He fired up at that. 'E 'ad a stick in 'is 'and; but, Lord! what's the use of a stick at close quarters? I marked 'im, all right. And would you believe it, when I went back an' told 'er what I'd done, she fired up and told me I was a brute, and that evening the missus give me notice to go."

John smiled a deliberative smile. "But, bless you, I didn't go. They couldn't get on without me 'angin'

about, and the next night Miss Aroha came an' asked me to tell 'er all about the scrap. And when I told 'er 'ow that bloke 'ad stood up to me, and took 'is gruellin' like a man—'e was a thin Australian bloke, plenty of reach but no stamina—when I told 'er of his pluck, the colour came into 'er face again and she told me that I was to stay. But she said that she would never forgive me for what I'd done—never. And I don't believe she 'as, neither, though that's two years ago. Now, ain't women funny creetchers?"

They both sat silent for a long time.

"'E was a game enough bloke, too," said John, at last. "I don't wonder at 'er bein' fond of 'im."

Then John launched out again upon the wonders of Sydney, and King was content to let him talk.

So Aroha had forgotten him? It was a smart blow at his egotism. He writhed. But slowly a saner mood came. Had he not quite forgotten her? Women were said to be so constant. But what reason had he given her to remember him? Plainly, he could think of none. And then another thought came. She had her troubles, too; she in her turn had gone through the agony, had been seared by the furnace. Startlingly clear it came to him that this brought her only the nearer to him. They had both lived. They marched, after all, upon the same road of life—a road of regrets and pain and memories. Each had gone far, and perhaps the two paths were even now converging. He felt an overpowering desire to see her again, to change greetings with this other soul who knew what life in all its splendour and all its sordidness was. How she must have suffered! And through suffering he had learnt how suffering craves sympathy. At least they could meet again as friends.

And Aroha was in New Zealand, in that wind-

swept, rugged ribbon of land lying far out in the midst of the illimitable Pacific. New Zealand, where he was to find energy and hope, hope and—Aroha!

His incurable egotism was about him once more!

And in that noisy, sweltering tea-shop, beneath the streets of Sydney, King shut his eyes and saw again Aroha with an aureole of memories about her, standing high on the summit of the tussock ridge, her dark eyes glad for him, her lithe, sweet, joyous body breasting the sturdy wind.

XXVIII

JOHN suddenly tired of Sydney and slipped off to New Zealand. He wanted to get cool, he said. King went to see him off, and as he stood on the crowded, black, festering wharf, beneath a dome of implacable, hazy heat, and watched the clumsy steamer swing slowly off and grope her way among the plague of ferry boats in these much-churned waters of the upper harbour, he felt the attack of a sudden loneliness. There, where that steamer would be in four days, lay his own land; he yearned for the cooling sight of snow-swathed, glistening peaks.

And in the months of great heat that followed, when blazing days alternated with sombre, grey-clouded days of humid heat or a tropical downpour that brought no coolness with it but left the wet world steaming, he grew more and more listless. The thought of Aroha came persistently to him in this period; but he reflected that though he might return to Maoriland the chances of his seeing her again were remote. And if he and she did meet, what bond, save the bond of already faded memories, could be spoken of between them? She had made no sign; her mind was filled with other memories. Yet the thought that New Zealand held Aroha seemed to vaguely strengthen the ties that were slowly drawing him back to his own land.

Stirred by the possibility of once more returning to New Zealand, sometimes he took out a canvas

and made studies. He would feel his way. His ambition was not dead.

Then one day his chance came.

The one friend whom he had not forgotten in New Zealand was his old university chum, Charles Craven, the lawyer who was also a poet. King and he had at intervals exchanged letters. But King had been somewhat troubled by the details of his friend's career given in those rare letters of his. Craven had gone on with his legal studies; on graduation at the university he had entered a lawyer's office in Dunedin, and at last, determining to set up in practice for himself, he had moved to a rising bush township in the North Island. The inherited dislike of the city had showed itself in him; and his acumen was not at fault in the move. For Waiatua was the centre of a newly-opened block of forest land, upon the proposed North Island trunk railway-line. And his business was prospering.

But King noticed from his letters that, as his legal business prospered, the earlier ambition of his life, the determination to be a poet, had strangely pined. He spoke less and less of his poetry. In reply to King's direct questions he admitted that he had less inclination nowadays to write poetry: the inspiration did not seem to come so easily. The glorious days of splendid eagerness to compose had passed. In the absorption of his legal work his brain was claimed more and more by legal technicalities. He had not the time to write poetry. There were other things more important. Besides, he had married a wife.

But, in all his correspondence with his friend, he held to an intense admiration for King's courageous fight for the recognition of his art. Charles wrote to King from the standpoint of one who had failed in

his chosen domain, and yet had found much in life to interest and console him, to one who stood apart, solitary and revered, upon the steep pinnacle of a great ambition. Good-naturedly he kept for King the admiration once he had thought not unworthy for himself. But that was before he had gone in for law, before he had married a wife. Of King's recent breakdown he had not heard. King had not been able to mention it to one to whom he felt it would mean so much.

And now, in the course of a discursive letter to King, Craven, after reproaching him for his long silence, mentioned the fact that his legal practice had so prospered of late that he was beginning to consider the necessity of finding a partner. But the difficulty of getting a good man was great. All the smart young barristers whom he knew preferred to make their way in the big cities. To enter into partnership with him would mean practically to bury oneself in the wilderness. But for himself, as he had long ago given up the idea—if he had ever more than vaguely held it—that he was destined to rise high in his profession, he did not regret his removal to the country, with its satisfactory concomitant of a steady and increasing practice. Perhaps some day he would stand for Parliament . . .

King saw in that chance mention of his friend's intended partnership the opportunity for his return to New Zealand. He knew that Craven would be glad to have him as his partner. Already King's position in the legal firm was satisfactory, but there was little hope of his rising further in the office; and he was not well enough known, nor possessed of sufficient capital, to think of setting up in practice for himself in Sydney. But a partnership with his old friend in Waiatua would ask for no capital; it was

a steady business, and the work would not be hard. Besides, it would be in his own country.

But it was not easy to decide. He turned instinctively to Miss Smith for advice. The same afternoon he met her as she passed his office. He knew the time she came by, and sometimes, when he wanted companionship, he waited for her. He noticed this afternoon that she was wearing a great bunch of wattle that he had left at her door that morning. He noted, too, a startled air of smartness about her trim, drab-coloured person. He wondered . . . perhaps she was in love—with one of the clerks at the photographic studio. He tried to picture her married—a mother of a family—and failed to call up any picture at all. Her future was as indefinite as her present. She was not an individual that one could hang fancies upon. No, she would just go on retouching, retouching. Yet he was glad that she was wearing his wattle.

They walked through the Domain on their way to Darlinghurst. It was a pleasant afternoon, cool with the delicious zest of the southerly. It looked temptingly refreshing toward the harbour, and without a word they turned into the Botanical Gardens. Under one of the big bamboo groves they found a seat and watched a tall fountain spray its misty coolness across the thick sward of buffalo grass. The southerly whispered faint messages to the delicate plumes of the swaying bamboos.

He told her of the letter.

"What does it mean?" she asked him, almost passionately. "Are you going away?"

"Well, it seems to me a chance, you know, to—"

"But a lawyer in a country town! It doesn't sound tempting!"

"I don't know. It means getting back to New

Zealand, to my own country. And after that I need not always stay there. I might set up in Dunedin. You know, I've always been a stranger here."

Barbara Smith looked away. "Yes," she breathed softly, "you're a stranger here. There is nothing to bind you to Australia now."

"Nothing—now," he echoed, with an absolute conviction that seemed to the woman like a verdict of death. And she would lose him for ever. Lose him? She almost laughed aloud. Why, she had never possessed him—nor one part of him!

"But your career?" she began, fighting for something that seemed to her all that life could ever mean. "You will give that up?"

"Yes," he said slowly. "I cannot paint—at least, I shall not be able to paint for years. I am not hopeless about it. But I feel I must give up a lot. I've had my try, and failed. For the present I must put it aside. But in Maoriland I might take it up again; I feel that in my own country . . ." His voice trailed away, his eyes aloof upon the inconceivably distant horizon.

"But, shut up in New Zealand, what chance would you have of learning? You need the stimulus of artistic minds. Here you are still in the atmosphere."

At any cost she would hold him near her.

"Ah! you believe in me!" he said gladly. "I think you're the only person who still believes in me. Why?"

But she gave no answer, did not move. Then he continued, slowly: "I've thought it all out. I owe something to the world; I must pay for my attempt. Now I must set to work in earnest. I've been long enough among the clouds; now I must find a foothold on earth. But while I stay here I find myself

beginning to wonder again whether I can paint. It leaves me restless, eager to take up the brush again. I want to get away from the smell of the paint. I mean to put art away from me. I want to take my place in the ranks of the workers, do my share with the others. Perhaps, years afterwards, when I know my limitations better, I may take it up again. Perhaps this is a phase that I must pass through; it seems to me that I need a rest from art. I must come in contact with the real work of the world. I've been dallying too long. Hard work is the tonic I need. I owe it to life. I want to win people's respect—my own respect. You would not hold me back—advise me to stay?"

Could she? Why not let him see—not by voice, but one glance would suffice—that he was so much to her? He would not be slow to understand. And if she told him of her love for him, would he not shelter her from her shameful immodesty? For a few mad moments she dallied desperately with this thought. Women had done this thing. Was she such a coward?

But if she let him see her stupendous secret—and he merely pitied her! That was the terrible possibility. She could not face that, not even for the sake of her great love.

Besides, was she not selfish and mean to seek to hold him to her? What was she to him that she should put herself in the balance against his heart's desire? And in her soul she respected him for the strength that underlay that resolution. But all her womanhood revolted against the thought that she was not of value to him. She would make him the wife he unconsciously craved—the mother she dimly yearned to be.

But he did not know it, would never know it! And

perhaps there was someone hidden in the shadows of the future, waiting among the years till he came by, someone whom God in his heaven had, at the beginning of things, promised for his mate. She was not that woman; and yet how could any woman love him better than she did? Her decision was taken. She loved him—ah! she so loved him!—so she let him go.

They walked home together in the dusk, home to the boarding-house that meant not home to either, and yet was as near home as one was ever to reach.

So King wrote to his friend, offering himself for the position of partner, and received a cable asking him to come over at once. A fortnight later his passage was booked for New Zealand.

The day before the steamer sailed he had been packing all the morning and found himself unexpectedly with an afternoon on his hands. He had said good-bye to all his friends, but as he was turning out a drawer in his room he came upon a bundle of old letters. He glanced carelessly at the writing before adding them to the growing heap upon the floor. He recognised the writing of Gertrude. A recollection of all that once she had meant to him overcame him, and—even yet a dallier in sensations—he felt that it was impossible for him to leave Australia without telling her of his intention.

He took a tram to the city and made his way to Circular Quay. The Mosman boat was just coming into sight. He waited for its arrival, strolling to the edge of the landing-stage. Beside him he noticed an old blind man and his wife. She had led him quite to the water's edge, and he stood gazing, with sightless eyes, across the invisible water, intent upon the sound of the approaching paddle-wheels. King watched

him curiously. What was a blind man doing there? What pleasure could he get from such an experience?

The harbour swam in a rich glow of sunlight; colour played freakishly upon every wave; everywhere in water and air was an incessant, unwearied movement; life glittered and shone; warmth and exhilaration was in the air; white foam and green wave made pleasant harmony of hue; the vivid colours of women's dresses sent a fresh and ever-changing spray of light upon the eye.

And in the midst of this riot of colour the old man stood solitary, shut for ever out of this splendid paradise. He was a thousand universes away, as far from his kind as if he dwelt in a cosmos that had only two dimensions. He could not see. Nothing of all that glory was for him, none of it could touch him; now he was for ever enveloped in an imaginable loneliness. It was piteous!

King was touched with the pathos of it. Perhaps the man had been a sailor, and now that his sight had been withdrawn from him, now that all he felt was a blank, incomprehensible wall broken by murmurs that came as from a vast immensity beyond, he made his wife lead him out again to smell the keen splendour of the sea, to feel again its salt breath upon his eager cheek. It was piteous!

The boat arrived and he got on board. He saw the old woman lead her husband carefully back to a seat on the landing-stage, without a word. The old man sat down silently, patiently—it seemed to King infinitely appeased.

The incident sickened King. Life was bitterly cruel, uselessly malignant. Wherever one looked there lurked pathos.

At Gertrude's home he was shown into the drawing-

room. She was at home. He sat down. He remembered the room so well. Once it had seemed to him—as all the house had seemed to him—almost a shrine, sacred because it held the wonder of Gertrude's common daily life. Among these pieces of furniture she indifferently moved; those unconscious flowers had been tenderly touched by her fingers; the soulless piano was sacrosanct.

He smiled lightly at the thought now. After all, she was merely an ordinary girl, one of the innumerable feminines. And upon her he had placed robe after robe of ineffable attributes; and now that he had ruthlessly stripped her bare of all of them she stood before him a woman that could no longer exact worship, a being whom he could criticise and judge. Once he had believed that without her life would be impossible; yet their paths had separated and neither seemed to feel the severance. Life seemed to him to mean nothing but the adaptation of oneself to the changes in one's environment, nothing but an easy faculty for putting up with things.

And now King recalled the picture of the blind man at Circular Quay. Perhaps, after all, what he had seen was not pathetic. He felt sure that if he had questioned the blind man he would have expressed himself as not discontented. He had lost his sight, true; but that was long ago, almost forgotten. At first it had been hard—terribly hard—but gradually had come other compensations. His world had mysteriously changed, but he was still alive, still capable of the mere joy of existence. And this new world into which he had been so inexplicably flung was a large and wondrously varied world. The veil that had been let down before him was not impenetrable. Of late he had felt it slowly thinning and melting away; he had almost forgotten there

was a veil. Already it was becoming difficult to remember exactly what sight was; and he was beginning in his mind to question whether sight was of much value after all. It seemed to him that within the great greyness that surrounded his existence there was no need for sight. It would only confuse and annoy. He found he got on well enough without it; and a new world—a very subtle and delicate world of touch had gradually enveloped him. Ah! he understood that universe of touch; he was at home there! Nature was adapting herself, as with her ancient, insidious wisdom she always adapted herself, to the changed environment. And so regret had not long survived the moment when it was useless to regret. Grief dies. That is the most hopeful lesson of life. And yet how many a grieving heart has rebelled against the death of an old, jealously-revered sorrow!

And this old blind man was just as cheerful as he had been before his loss of sight. He was alive, able to exist. That was the main thing. If sight were to be restored to him he would be glad—when the pain in his eyes had died down and he had become used to the glare from that newly-opened window; but if he were permitted to live altogether in this misty greyness he would not grumble. So even here pathos had eluded him. And King dimly guessed the rapture far transcending his own delight that that vaguely-remembered vision of ships and sunlight and the sea had brought to the blind old man.

Was there any pathos in anything? Did we not put into the lives of others pathos that had no existence save in our own minds? Was not pathos, by a sweet decree of life, incapable of being perceived by those whom we thought pathetic? Was there, then, any pathos at all? We read too much into the

sufferings of others. There were always the compensations. He remembered Jennie Wave, the Anæmic Niece at his boarding-house. She suffered, indeed, and cried out. Yet within the narrow limits of her life she could have found happiness. But she had not learnt Nature's lesson, she had not accommodated herself to her environment. She, an invalid, should have kept her ambitions invalid. So she had found unhappiness, when Nature, the soother, was at her hand with the gift of content. But even this wilful soul had her compensations, for life is no niggard consoler. She had shut her life within the splendid wonderland of a dream, and the domain she had chosen was more glorious than any that grey life had to show. Within her narrow bedroom she had caught and caged an iridescence of life and colour that eluded the blinded world. Out of four walls and a bed she had built a splendid, fantastic, impossible heaven.

And as he waited—Gertrude surely was not hurrying—he attempted to recall the passion he had spent on this girl who was now a stranger to him. He had forgotten the intensity of it already. So it would continue to fade, and in a few years he would have completely forgotten, completely adapted himself to his environment. And once he had anguished, yearned, passionately desired. . . .

He heard her step in the passage and the blood swept to his temples. So she was part of him still. Not all of him had grown callous. Her image was still in his soul; she was part of himself, and he could not escape from himself.

She came into the room, exquisitely dressed. It occurred to him as they murmured greetings that she had taken particular trouble to appear at her best, perhaps in order that he might see all that he had lost.

"So you're going away?" she said lightly, though the shadow in her eyes deepened. "I'm so sorry."

It was all so banal to the man. He wondered why he had come. She murmured her regrets as any chance acquaintance might have murmured them. And he had held that strange, aloof, unassailable thing for an eternity passionately throbbing in his arms! And she sat on one side of the room and he on the other, and with difficulty they kept up a discursive conversation.

"You'll have some tea?" she asked after a pause, and King, with a gasp of relief, assented. It would carry them over the disconcerting intervals. He remembered, as the maid came in with the tea, that when Gertrude had had tea with him in the old days each had rallied the other on the palpable fact that they had lost their appetites. King recalled that then he had been too much occupied by Gertrude's overpowering beauty and the fact of her near presence to him to pay any attention to material needs.

Now he noticed that he asked for a third cup, and that Gertrude laughingly kept pace.

"It's such a hot afternoon!" she sighed.

She was wonderfully beautiful. But the thought that all that wonder of grace was for another gave him no pang. He found himself rejoicing in the fact of her beauty as one would rejoice in the art of a great picture. He noted the subtle harmonies of her lovely colouring, cool dress and the darkened drawing-room, and felt only one desire—to paint her.

They talked of impersonal things. And yet he knew that underneath that flow of chatter lay the deep currents of memory, moving noiselessly to their destined end. And she knew. In her mind a

memory of moon-lit sea, a swirl of waves and a dome of dim stars, suddenly came into her brain with the cruel vividness of a photograph. She paused in the midst of a sentence, and silence fell.

At last King looked up and met her eyes. He forced himself to speak.

"Well, good-bye," he said, with difficulty refraining from adding "Gertrude." "It is time I went."

"Good-bye; good luck!" she said.

"We part friends?" he asked, seeing, as he uttered the words, the futility of the question.

"Friends? Of course; why not? We were always friends, weren't we?"

They shook hands.

Into King's mind came a picture of sullen white lines of foam beneath the impassive serenity of the moon, and beneath him he felt the slow, silky lift of the ground-swell of the Pacific, moving with a blind magnificence across the world.

XXIX

KING did not return to his lodgings for dinner. A friend met him on the ferry boat and took him off to dine at one of the *cafés*. It was ten o'clock before he reached his lodgings in Darlinghurst. He had broken away rather impatiently from his friend, on the plea of having some packing to finish. He had calculated on spending his last evening in Australia with Miss Barbara Smith.

When he let himself in there were people in the drawing-room; but she was not among them. He stepped out on to the balcony. He groped in the semi-darkness towards her accustomed chair and found it empty.

He asked the maid for her. He was told that she had gone to bed, "With a bad headache, sir."

So that was it. These women and their weaknesses! He had been looking forward to an evening with her, the last evening he would be able to spend with her—indeed, he had given up a pleasant evening with his friend in order to see her (indeed, he was very much injured!)—and she had chosen this night of all the nights in the year to have a bad headache!

But a better feeling overcame this momentary disappointment. He stared half-amazed at himself. Had he been through so much and yet was so immovably selfish? The little girl was ill, suffering.

As he passed her room, going up stairs, he hesitated. A light came beneath the door. He knocked.

Yes, she was awake. Who was it? Oh!—Yes, she was very sorry, she was hardly ill—just got a bad headache. No, she would be all right in the morning. No, he couldn't do anything for her. It was most good of him to interest himself, to offer. She would be quite well in the morning. Good-night. In the morning—

King went slowly up to his room to bed. He was intensely sorry for her. She had so little out of life, and she never complained. So, thinking of her, he went to sleep.

But it was long before Barbara slept. True, she had a headache; but it was a headache of her emotions. All that day she had been fighting herself. Through the long hours of her work, retouching and retouching patiently the features on the negatives of people she had never seen, never cared to see, she had questioned herself unceasingly. She loved King; happily for her there was no doubt of that. She felt dimly that if she let him go now she would let slip the only chance of happiness life held out to her. But what could she do? Did he not love her? All that day she had revolved that question in her mind, and at the close of the day she had convinced herself that he depended on her, cared for her. Sometimes she guessed that he pitied her, and though the thought made her hot with anger and hate, she would not let it go. She ended by clutching at it almost savagely. If he began by pitying her, he might come to— Oh! how she hated herself for the utter humility of her love! She accepted even his pity!

But she loved him, and felt that she could not demand much more from him than a pitying love.

It was not the love of which year after year she had fiercely dreamed, but it was all that life had for one of her colourless individuality. And even a pitying love would be so much—from King!

But when he did not return for dinner she grew desperate. She must see him before he left her for ever. Something might happen yet. She could not believe that he did not love her—a little. And she would be content—oh! gratefully and fully content!—with that little. Perhaps he scarcely knew it himself; he would find out only after he had left her, when it was irretrievably too late. Would it be unwomanly of her to tell him, to throw her love, naked and ashamed, at his feet? It was unwomanly, wrong; but not if a woman loved with the greatness of her love. That was her supreme excuse. She felt in every fibre of her being that this hidden great love of hers must find expression. It was a burden too heavy for a woman to bear. Anything—pity, indifference, pitiless laughter—would be better to bear than this suppression of her heart's keen instincts, this terrible loneliness and solitude of soul.

Then after dinner she went up to the balcony and waited and waited. King would return, would find his way to her side, and then she would shyly tell him her splendid secret. She understood him so well! Surely he would understand? She knew that he would understand. And then—perhaps—surely—inevitably he would take her into his arms and hush her doubts with the words she was so thirsty for.

So she sat patiently waiting for him, and it seemed to her that she sat thus till late into the night. And he did not come. Then she sighed and went up to her bedroom. And there she cried and cried.

But when King knocked at her door—she knew it was his knock; she, thrilling, had recognised his footstep on the stairs—all had suddenly come right. He loved her, then. He had come to tell her so Her head was beginning to throb and throb strangely. Perhaps this was madness; perhaps she was not quite herself, not quite responsible; but she knew that he was in love with her. And it seemed to her that through all that vast turmoil in her throbbing brain that one wondrous fact shone vivid and quiet, like the steady glow of a great beacon. Love had found his way to her at last.

But he was going away. It was too late. He would never see her again.

No; at any cost she must prevent that. At first she thought of dressing and going to him, making him come down to the balcony with her—it could not be so late, after all! But no, she could not do that. Yet she had no other opportunity of seeing him. To-morrow at breakfast? Fancy telling a man you loved him at his breakfast! She laughed hysterically.

Ah! she must write. She could trust herself to write. She hastily searched and found some paper and ink and wrote to King. It was a long letter, and in it she laid a heart bare. All the endless monotony of her life, all the chilling sameness of her work, all the long starvation of her heart, all the craving that almost killed her for affection, for sympathy, for love, lay plain and piteously appealing in that letter. She wrote feverishly, racked and tormented by the incessant pain in her head. Her pen flew; but the incoherent torrent of her thoughts outran it. At last she suddenly broke off, and without reading her words closed and addressed the letter.

Then she leant back wearily. The pain in her head was almost gone. Now she could think. She must deliver it immediately, this night. He was not asleep yet. She would go up to his door and push it beneath. She could easily slip upstairs unseen. He would find it in the morning. He would tell her at breakfast.

She crept upstairs with the letter. As her eyes came level with his door she saw that no light came from beneath it. He was asleep.

She bent down and pushed the letter under the door. There seemed little space even for her letter, and she had to manœuvre it beneath the door with some care. She pushed it well out of sight, remembering that it must not be seen by the maid in the morning. Then she crept downstairs and went to bed with a serene heart. She had made her fight for happiness; she had not faltered, she had striven and would abide by her venture. She had given way to her deepest instincts, and therefore was happy. She had been herself.

Next morning she was late down for breakfast. She entered the room in a great trepidation, despite the fact that she had listened in vain for King's footstep on the stairs. Still, he might be there awaiting her. At that moment she would have given life itself for the privilege of recalling that terrible letter. She must have been mad the night before. She recalled the headache as a pitiable excuse. And yet, now he would know. She was glad of that. His eyes would tell her that he knew. And a sudden, incomprehensible pride surged up into her heart. Her love for him was her shield. He was too strong and too gentle not to reverence her sincerity.

And he was not in the breakfast-room.

She looked at the clock. She had just fifteen minutes to breakfast in. She could not possibly be late for her work. After all, that was the important thing. That was life. All her happiness might hang on a few minutes snatched from the round of her tasks, but she was so wedded to habit, so enslaved by the implacable regularity of her work, that though the thought occurred to her to fling aside responsibility for one day and refuse to go to the studio, a something more puissant than herself forced her back into the accustomed grooves, and she knew that nothing could ever interfere with the important and momentous fact of her invariable punctuality.

She hurried through her meal and rose. King had not come. He must have overslept himself. She left the house, looking back. But perhaps his late arrival was deliberate. He had found her letter and did not care to see her then. He would find it too delicate a matter to discuss in the breakfast-room of a lodging-house. He would come to her workroom and see her there. He would have something to tell, something that she did not fear. He was generous and gentle. At the worst he would only pity her. She was prepared now to accept even that.

King was annoyed that morning on entering the breakfast-room late to find that Barbara had gone. She might have waited to see him the last morning of his stay! However, he would call at her office and say good-bye there. He had hoped to have had a long talk with her, and was deeply disappointed. She was his best friend. And last night she had a bad headache. Dimly a vision came to him of her ill in Sydney, lonely, uncared for. He was glad to find that she had been better that morning.

As he came down to breakfast he had not noticed

a little strip of white lying almost invisible by the door. The letter had been pushed almost entirely beneath a strip of carpet.

He had various little important forgotten things to do that morning. After lunch he made his way to the photographic studio where Barbara was employed. It was a garishly-decorated place in George Street. From great frames popular actresses glared from stony eyes or piteously appealed from wide pools of treacly pathos. In the vestibule society women in evening dress, actors with feminine faces, and hard-featured popular preachers stared superciliously into the faces of the public. Upstairs was a drawing-room littered with photographs, and behind the counter was an aggressively beautiful girl, whose face, to his mind, seemed to have been flattened and reduced to immobility by its exposure to innumerable photographic lenses.

She arrogantly informed him he could see Miss Smith, and triumphantly swept him into a bleak apartment to wait for her. There was a heavy smell of chemicals everywhere. A sense of dinginess, of dismal makeshift cheapness pervaded the room. It was in that atmosphere of chemicals, amid this depressing melancholy of the back premises, that Miss Smith went on with her ceaseless painting of the portraits of unknown people, this mechanical beautifying of features that were more beautiful in their captious ugliness, this relentless smoothing away of character from even the few who possessed it in their faces. A sickening of the soul overcame him. It was all so stupid, so unnecessary.

Suddenly he was aware that Miss Smith had entered the room. She looked more mouse-like than ever in her drab working blouse, but in her eyes was a brightness that seemed strangely out of place

in this dismal back room. Her attitude questioned him.

"Well?" she breathed, fluttering.

"I've come to say good-bye," he said. "I did not have the chance of seeing you last night or this morning. I hope the headache has quite gone?"

Her hand had mechanically gone to her head. The room seemed to her to have suddenly darkened She forced herself to remember that the sun was shining—outside.

"Good-bye? Of course," she said. "It would have been mean of you to go away without saying good-bye to me."

"I was looking forward to having a yarn with you last night. I am sorry you weren't very fit."

"Oh, but I knew you would call to-day. I was expecting you in the morning."

She felt ashamed of her weakness. She was repeating words that to her were absolutely meaningless. She felt herself a frightened child waiting some terrible blow, waiting to be found out. But why did he torture her? Why did he not speak out? That was not like him. He was always so considerate. Even if he did not love her. She looked keenly at his face and something told her the terrible truth. He did not love her! But why, why did he not say . . .?"

"Do you work here?" he asked curiously.

"No; we retouchers have another room, not so pretty a room, but of course it has more light. There are a lot of us, and they always keep me amused by their talk. Do you know—" She felt that at any cost she must talk. If she stopped she would faint or stupidly fall into tears. The suspense of his silence was too hard for her to bear. She must keep

talking. "Do you know, the girls all round me seem to lead the funniest lives. They all seem to be acting in melodramas. The things that occur to them are the very things that occur in penny novelettes. They love and hate whole-souledly. They talk of rivals and vengeance and fatal jealousy. They fall in love with pale-faced, interesting-looking gentlemen whom they pass in the street. They are loved by their sweethearts with a passionate abandon, and give details of their love-affairs with a most embarrassing frankness. They have secret enemies who plot evil to their love, and two of the girls have even shown me anonymous letters that they have received from unknown rivals about their 'boys.' Real anonymous letters! I thought they only existed in novels. And all the men they meet are either wicked or good, villains or heroes. I wonder whether the penny novelettes and the melodramas are, after all, nearer to real life—the life of their class—or whether they don't live at all themselves but are mere puppets played upon by the suggestions of the theatre and the magazines—?"

No; she could not go on like that. She must know. She came closer to him. "You know," she almost whispered, "nobody can overhear us here. If—"

King felt vaguely sorry for her, shut up among those stupid and sentimental girls. Heavens! how out of her element she was here! Why couldn't she get out of it all? And he would never see her again.

"You've been awfully good to me, Barbara," he said. "I shall never forget your goodness. The sympathy, the kindness—you've helped me so much, pulled me up when I—"

She stopped him with a hysterical laugh. Her

goodness! He was talking of her sympathy when she was aching with her love for him. How could he be so callous?

"I'll write and tell you how I'm getting on," he continued. "And you must write often to me. Don't hesitate to tell me all your troubles—every one. Often I have seen that you've got things on your mind, things that perhaps are the cause of those headaches; but you're really such a difficult person to sympathise with. You don't take people into your confidence. I think you are too proud, too restrained. You should let your friends help you; you should let your friends see a little further into your heart, perhaps. Barbara, I shall never forget you. You have been so good to me. Only now I am beginning to see how much you have done for me. But I suppose that is your way; you must be helping someone. It's the mother-heart that I fancy is in every woman."

Now the girl's mind was clear. He would not mention the letter. He did not love her at all. That had been all a mistake. She saw that so vividly now. But he would not say a word to let her see he knew. That was like his chivalry. That was his splendid, superb, glorious way. He would hold her secret in his heart—a sacred thing. No; he would never betray her—not even to his wife. For surely he would marry. Perhaps he would reverence her for her frankness. He always liked her sincerity. No; he would never despise her for her letter. And if he pitied her he would never let her see. And she would have to be content with his pity. Even his pity. . . .

A silence fell. They looked at each other. He was strangely moved by a feeling of the loss to him that this parting would mean. He had not realised

how much he had come to depend upon her serene sympathy.

They looked at each other through that silence. Then the same thought leapt to the mind of each.

He was going away, severing for ever his life from hers. They were good friends. Why should he not take her just once into his arms and kiss her on the lips . . .?

A man's voice called Miss Smith.

"Oh, I must run!" cried the girl. "That's the manager. I've been talking too long. Good-bye."

She hurriedly held out her hand. He grasped it.

Then she went quickly back to her retouching.

XXX

As the steamer swung into the narrow entrance of Wellington Harbour, King felt his heart go out in a great friendship for his own land. The bare, bleak, cleared steep hills that guarded that inland lake from the tumultuous currents of the Straits spoke to his flaccid heart of strength and the strenuous life. Here was energy and youth. The little, crowded city, flung recklessly down into the narrow nest of valleys amid that wide tumult of rugged hills, seemed to him to embody the splendid enthusiasm of youth. And the city, craving room for its foothold upon the flat that edged the harbour shore, had forced its way upon a wide swath of reclaimed land further and further into the deep waters of the harbour. And in every gully, on every ridge the houses climbed.

And when King stepped ashore, the clean, bitter, crisp breeze that met him in this city swept by all the winds of the Pacific, the brilliant sun in a sky of plunging, full-bellied clouds, seemed to strike new vigour into King's enervated body. He felt the stir of an unchallengeable youth, the awakening of an almost forgotten vigour. He breathed deeply of this cool air; he looked with a keen pleasure at the warm blood in the cheeks of the passers-by, at their swift stride, at the incessant energy in every movement of their bodies, the careless youth in their unlined faces—and incidentally he lost his hat. He

had forgotten for the moment the custom of the Wellingtonian of rounding every corner at an angle inclined to the wind's direction, and he laughed happily as he chased his scudding straw. He would have laughed if he had lost it altogether. He was young again. He would do great things yet. They would see. . . . He would show them! . . .

He did not wait long in Wellington, but took that afternoon the train to Waiatua.

But on the long journey to Waiatua his mood suffered from an inevitable relapse. After getting clear from Wellington the train ran into a welter of mountains, over the ridge of which it lifted itself slowly and cautiously with great extra engines in front and behind. And coming down the other side the heavy train had to make use of a third rail that acted as a break to check the steepness of the descent. Then over plains and through tunnels, till at last it ran into the bush country. Here the heavy covering of forest was being slowly cleared, and settlers were laboriously gaining access to the rich soil beneath.

But it made dismal wreck of a once superb beauty. It was the curse of ugliness that inevitably hangs upon progress. The bush with all its splendours, all its graciousness and coolness and shelter, had to go. The land was wanted for grass; and the wealth of innumerable ages of lush growth, stored like wine in those superb, sturdy, slow-growing forest giants, had to be sacrificed for the immediate needs of a pigmy and short-lived race. And the old sturdy trees, that had seen centuries of summers undisturbed by thought of decay, felt with a vague astonishment the first insignificant strokes of the axe on their smooth flanks, and wondered in a contemptuous disdain at the diminutive pests that upon their

ancient strength had made their wanton and inexplicable puny assaults. And still the tiny blows fell and fell with a growing meaning and a vague persistence that woke these old giants from their centuries of dreaming. And the gradual knife of the saw crept nearer and nearer their hearts with a pitiless menace, and suddenly the great monarchs felt through all their majestic vastness a tremor of fear; and ere that fear could take palpable meaning a last puny stroke of these busy insects sent them crashing, shuddering, groaning, shrieking, yet with a majesty still unconquerable, to their prostrate doom.

So day by day the age-old forests withered beneath the tiny strokes of these ephemeræ, and the corpses of the dead giants were ignominiously dragged by a team of straining bullocks through the bush-tracks to the final mutilation of the sawmill.

Then came the turn of the smaller denizens of the wondering forest, ruthlessly cut down and left to wither till dry enough for their cremation. Then one autumn day the country would swelter beneath a heavy pall of rolling smoke, and the withered trees, contemptuously given to the flames, would be "cleared" from the face of the earth they had so long sheltered with their cool, moist shade.

But even fire was powerless to effect utter ruin upon the sturdiness of these old forests. After the flames had laughed through the withered sacrifice, remained gaunt trunks, blackened and bleached, like ghosts, standing stark and grotesque amid a desolation of smouldering blackness; and for years afterwards those grim, unconquered corpses of a century-old dominion stood stiffly up with naked

and tortured limbs in terrible attitudes of agony, or pointing to the skies a last uncomprehending protest.

But about their bared feet, whence the green, moist loveliness of creeper and fern had withdrawn, leaving those gaunt, outstretched white roots like a mouth set in a wide snarl, the green grass was slowly rising, and over their fallen and slowly-rotting trunks the venturing sheep were already daintily picking their way. The land was beginning to repair the ravages of man ; the great, matted forest of the ages was being replaced by the trim, insignificant, shrunken forest of the grass or the taller, tawny-serried splendour of the wheat. And over some of those gaunt, naked trunks the kindly creepers were once more slowly climbing.

It was land yet in the dismal half-cleared state that the train ran through for thirty miles before it reached Waiatua, and the eternal succession of bleached or blackened corpses of trees, the sodden trunks lying where they had fallen, the sparse green that was but beginning to assert its healing kindness, the ugly little wharës of the struggling settlers, the bleakness of the railway-track through this avenue of newly-slain trees, the muddy road along which the carters laboured behind their teams of five—in front three horses pulling abreast—the unkempt selector's children that stood on the barbed-wire fences of the sections and waved at and cheered the passing of the train — all this gradually sent a feeling of depression over King. He was coming to a country where life did not go so easily, so recklessly as in that fairy city of the sea. Here he touched the beginnings of life; here the struggle was undisguised and bitterly strenuous. There was no trifling with the imperturbable strength of Nature ; there was

no repose, no sloth in the wrestle with that unwounded foe. Work was the word this country said—Work!

The train drew up at the station and King looked vainly for the scattered houses of the township. But the railway was only pushing its way through this almost impenetrable forest, and, creeping along the valley, it had almost ignored the presence of the township. Waiatua lay two miles away, on the coach road to Wellington.

Charles Craven was on the platform. King stepped out upon the muddy surface of the station with a little feeling of disgust. Rain had fallen heavily, and the road that ran away into the bush looked a sea of slush. The first thing he noticed about his old friend was his boots. They were heavy and clumsy and coated thick with half-dried mud. King glanced dismally at his own foot-gear, thin-soled, dainty, smart. Life had not reached refinements here; he must come to grips with it on the lowest plane, accommodate himself to its crudities. Well, it was all what he had to pay for his failure. He had done with illusions now. And he began to feel a grim respect of himself growing within him at the thought.

There was a difference, too, in his old friend's face. He had grown—what was the word?—commonplace. How much of this first impression was due to his closely-cropped hair and his drooping moustache—both being the evidences of a country barber's fancy—King could not fairly determine. But his first impression of Craven was one of chilling disappointment He remembered Charles's look of invincible youth, the splendid arrogance of his glance, the fire that, when he declaimed his verse, made his face a glory, the unconquerable belief in himself that made his every speech a prophecy.

And it had all faded out of him. Charles Craven, the country lawyer, stood before him eagerly grasping his hand. The other Charles, the poet Charles, was dead, buried somewhere, forgotten, perhaps, beneath this shrewd, contented, moderately prosperous exterior.

It seemed to King that he heard, faint and far, a thin trickle of mocking laughter. . . .

Craven was indeed glad to see him again. "That's right!" he exclaimed as the two shook hands. "Glad to see you at last. You must have come up first train from Wellington. Hardly expected you so soon; only got your wire a couple of hours ago. Thought you'd like to stay a few days in Wellington. Big town always has its attractions. Not that there aren't attractions in the back-blocks. Good shooting over on the range, and there are pigs up in the Whakaroa Valley. We must fix up a hunt. You'll stay at my place, of course. We've just built a new room. We're getting on, you know, and the wife believes in us having a little comfort now. There's the Royal Hotel, of course, if you'd like to go there, but you know what country hotels are like. No, there aren't any other hotels in the town yet. But the town 's bound to grow. All through the district dairy factories are springing up; why, there are nine factories within five miles of Waiatua—all prosperous. We're bound to progress. Now that the railway is getting along we mean to keep pace with it. It is opening up a great tract of bush country, and we mean to get our share of the good times coming. Two new buildings are going up in High Street—not counting the new room I've just had built on to my place—and I heard yesterday from our member that the Government intend to put a new culvert over the Onawe creek."

Craven bristled with pride. His trap was waiting them at the station, hitched behind the building. King's boxes were soon piled in it, and they started for the township along the muddy bush road.

During the drive the conviction came to King that he must relinquish much. He must sink out of sight, must merge his individuality in that of this aggressively strenuous, rising township. Craven seemed to have no individual existence apart from the fortunes of Waiatua. And once again King felt a glow of happiness within him as he contemplated the possibility that soon he, too, would live only for the progress of Waiatua.

He was a little shaken in his self-respect when they arrived at Waiatua. It was merely a scattered collection of new buildings straggling along the straight length of High Street—an absurdly wide High Street, built with a lavish provision for the bustle of traffic that was to come with the future. At present High Street was untenanted by vehicle and its expanse was chiefly mud.

"You should see High Street on Saturday mornings," said Craven, enthusiastically. "Why, the place is full of vehicles. The whole countryside comes into town then."

King could scarcely resist the infection of this wholesome belief in the future.

"You've changed a good deal, old chap," he said, glancing curiously at him.

"Grown old — grown commonplace and old. Married a wife and all that, you know. Well, we all come to it, don't we? No, by Gad! you've not come to it yet. How's that, now? Must be some explanation. Well, you wait till you see some of our beauties. Waiatua's famous for its beauties and its butter. Ha! ha!"

He rattled on, brisk and confident, serenely satisfied.

Then they turned into the yard of the largest house in the town—as Craven pointed out with arrogance—and King was made welcome by his friend's wife. Mrs Craven turned out to be a nice, little, commonplace, homely woman, of an indistinguished beauty and an implacable belief in her husband's brains. She helped him in his practice, shrewdly made friends with possible clients, and cemented his business with a carefully-calculated hospitality, beneath which a natural generosity could not be altogether concealed. She was liked throughout the district; the highest encomium of the back-blocks was unanimously passed upon her—she was not "stuck-up." King immediately divined that much of Charles's new briskness was due to the influence of this clever little wife. Her quiet, practical spirit had brought Charles to look with a faint contempt upon the unprofitable days of his early ideals. He had made no money out of them. It was permissible for boys to dream, but dreams led to nothing and boys grew up.

And as King looked round on the cosy house, the lavish supply of the latest magazines, the generous provision made for the classical novelists, the comfort and the rational luxuries of a prosperous household, he reflected that the present state of Craven's fortunes contrasted favourably with the meagre and precarious past. Craven had no cause to be dissatisfied with life. He had come through. He had won his way from the counter in his father's up-country store to this satisfactory and increasing practice. He could look life fairly in the face with the confidence at his heart that he had not misused its chances.

After dinner — during which King learnt that

there were two more members of the Craven family, who now occupied their respective cradles—Craven led King into his diminutive study, and the two took out their pipes.

The talk went gradually back to their early days at the university, when life lay before them like a gorgeous carpet spread out to the ends of the world.

"And you, too," said Craven, after a pause. "You've given up art. Well, we all come to it sooner or later, and we're all the happier because we do. Art, poetry, music, romance, ambition, ideals—they're all great things—perhaps the greatest things in the world—but they are all only different names for the same thing; they are only diverse manifestations of the greatest factor in life."

He paused, looking with puckered, vaguely-dissatisfied brow after the smoke ring he had just sent swimming slowly across the room.

"You mean?" said King, interested. "The one factor is?"

Craven came suddenly back to reality.

"Youth," he said, almost sadly. "Yes; we thought that we were heaven-sent poets, we dreamed that we were musicians and artists, we imagined and yearned and wondered and made sturdy resolutions to climb to the stars, we bravely buffeted the world in the face and were surprised that it did not wince, we trampled all the centuries beneath our feet, we puffed away the future as I break this smoke-ring, and all this was only that we were young. We had the terrible, beautiful, superb gift of youth, and straightway were poets and artists and heroes. And then—and then—suddenly, in a moment, or with an insidious slowness that was more horrible, youth left us, was gone, for ever gone. Life, which had stood aside grimly and silently

watching us dally and divinely dream, stepped out of the shadow and curtly said, 'Playtime is over. Time to work; time to live.' And reluctantly we put aside our toys and buckled to our work. Sullenly or smilingly we took up the burden of life. And here we are—you that might have been a Corot, I that was to have been a Browning—here we are, two ordinary, insignificant lawyers, fairly successful, fairly contented, fairly happy. Once we arrogantly demanded more from life than it had for us—more than we deserved, we see now. And now that life has opened her hands for us—ah! but we had to pull at the close-shut fingers!—we see that it was but an insignificant little that she had for us, after all. And yet we are not ungrateful. We have what we deserve. Yes, we are grateful."

"Don't you ever write poetry now?" asked King. Life was a sordid thing. How terribly it degraded and debased men! And yet it seemed to his real self that Craven was speaking the truth. He, King Southern, was not ungrateful to life. Yet he could not resist the question—"Don't you ever write poetry now?"

Craven looked up quickly. "Now, how did you guess that?" he said. "Yes, I do write sometimes. Seems to me that I'll always write poetry."

"Ah!" King laughed happily. "The youth hasn't quite gone, after all."

"No; sometimes it surges up. It seems invincible. I'm sure that the oldest man wakes up some mornings at the age of twenty-one. Only probably he doesn't remain twenty-one longer than to realise than he is ninety. Yes, I write sometimes—but there is a difference. I don't show it to my wife. I used to show her all I wrote, used to think that she was interested in all I wrote, but that was

before I married her. Now, after I've thoroughly revised and finished my poems, I usually burn them. There seems to be such an extraordinary amount of good poetry in the world already. Come to think of it, it's wonderful how little actual poetry there is in this life, and what an extraordinary lot of poems are written about it. Poets make the most of things, it seems to me."

"I see," said King, slowly, "you write poetry, but you don't show it to your wife."

"Well, you see," began Craven, with a little uneasy laugh, "my wife doesn't quite like that sort of thing. Not that she doesn't appreciate poetry and all that sort of thing—very cultured woman, my wife, well educated, B.A. at Canterbury College—all that sort of thing; but she thinks—and, I think, rightly—that a man cannot give his whole attention to conveyancing when he's writing epics. But you, now—don't you ever want to paint now?"

King detected a note of anxiety in his friend's voice, despite the ease with which the question was put.

"No," he said, "you needn't worry about my painting. I've given all that up—for a time, at least. I guess this work will take up all the spare time I'm likely to have. No; I've put it all away from me. Perhaps in the future—who knows . . .? Youth, you know, seems invincible."

A silence fell and the two looked back and ahead. So they had both come to this! It did not seem a glorious end to either of them. Yet it was an honest end, not to be despised. It was life that had used them so. And they had not been specially picked out for Fate to wreak her spite upon. They were merely part of the mass, atoms of the ruck. Once they had pictured for themselves

a glorious destiny — and glorious destinies were only for the elect. It was enough if life let them slip unobserved and unseen among the ranks of the happy indistinguished. They had achieved a certain comfort, a certain happiness. Would a wide fame have benefited them more? Was not this acquiescence in their smallness as dignified as a perpetual useless revolt? Was it not braver to recognise their capacity and abide within its limits than blindly to refuse assent to their littleness, persistently and hopelessly to strive for a star beyond their puny reach? It was a superb thing to be endowed with the divine discontent of ambition, but it was only the finer souls that could bear so great a burden. And they had found themselves out. Life had tamed them to a recognition of its facts. Who were they to shrink from the penalties of the indistinguished? It was worthier to do their duty in the spheres allotted to them. Therein they—albeit to an insignificant degree—helped on the generations, contributed their minute store to the cairn of progress. Better—unless you were a hero—to move along the easy grooves of the commonplace than uselessly and eternally to strive to escape their comfortable smoothness and shelter. At least they would be doing their duty. Ambition needs a hero's soul, and they were but sorry heroes.

So these two smoked and dreamed and sadly acquiesced, and felt a sturdy happiness rise within them at their acquiescence. They were doing their work—not the glorious work they had wanted and had been too weak to grapple with, but a less interesting, yet still satisfying work. It called forth the best of their energies; it kept them busy; it carried them on through life. And they were not unhappy, scarcely disappointed.

And once again it seemed to King that he heard, far off and faint, a tiny trill of mocking laughter.

Then he roused himself and broke the silence by a question about the character of the legal work, and the rest of the evening was spent in the discussion of technical details.

It was not an uninteresting life. The practice extended from Waiatua as a centre to half-a-dozen scattered townships around, and ran as far south as Wellington, whither one of the partners had to go almost every week to plead some case in the city court. The work involved much travel, much riding into unfrequented parts of the district, much interesting experience. On the whole it was pleasant work, set in a frame of incessant activity. The district was indeed prospering. Every individual in it was filled to the full with a great enthusiasm for it. The townships were growing rapidly. The axes rang with the steady and the remorseless iteration of the ticking of a great clock through the silence of immemorial, time-forgetting forests; and, like the steady striking of the hours, the groaning fall of the forest giants struck through the drowsy peace of the sombre and motionless bush. And like great white mushrooms springing up in a night the surveyors' tents appeared beside the cleared side of some half-hidden creek; and across this rugged welter of hills a narrow, mathematically-straight swath was imperturbably cut to where a square gap appeared in the distant sky-line of some bush-crowned mountain ridge. New roads were being pushed into the heavy, moist solitude of the valleys, or, bending and retreating, carried by wooden bridges across the ends of the steep gullies, ran slowly—a thin, straight, zig-zagging line—up the side of the mountains to some high pass.

And the saw-mills hummed ceaselessly, and day by day the bullock teams or the steam tramways carried the corpses of the slain trees to fill their yawning maws. Day by day grew the great heaps of sawdust, brown and pungent-scented, like gigantic ant-hills raised by some pertinacious insect, till the low buildings were almost smothered beneath the detritus of the carcases they had so greedily devoured. And in the autumns the burnings enveloped the township for weeks with heavy smoke, through which the ineffective sun looked like a bronze platter, ruddy and portentous and unreal. And almost to the sight the forests withered away: the settlers felled their acres, and bare, rude, diminutive wharës, roofed with sheets of blue galvanised iron and surrounded with barbed-wire fences, took feeble possession of the cleared areas. The cattle pushed their way into the undergrowth, making tracks through the impenetrable, and the light and air let into the forest struck death into the heart of those creeper-swathed and moss-hung forest trees. And they withered slowly as if the breath of the fire had caught them. And slowly the settlers gathered the useless, rotting trunks of the fallen giants into heaps and set them on fire. These smouldered for weeks, great funeral pyres of a doomed race. And the stump-extractors were set at work, with creaking chains and tugging horses, and slowly the roots that had sucked centuries of life from the moist, rich, virgin soil were drawn shrieking up and cast upon the funeral pyres. And the plough precariously shore the new-cleared land, and soon the rough, uneven paddock was sprouting with a new and wonderful green.

And the townships slowly grew. Round a distant accommodation house, set at the junction of two

roads, clustered a few buildings—stores, blacksmiths' shops, bakers' shops, public-houses, farms, roadmen's shanties—and the little aggregation—known till then as "Robinson's," or "Half-way House" to somewhere—took unto itself a dignified Maori or English name and began to think of establishing a weekly paper. And the scattered settlers combined to establish dairy factories; a tall, placid Swede arrived one morning from somewhere with his laboratory and his test-tubes and took charge of the roomy, airy, iron-roofed factory buildings; and soon the carts loaded with the huge cans of milk were converging from the distant settlers' farms and disgorging their white streams into the wide tanks of the factory; the great steam-churns began to ponderously revolve, and the sweet-smelling butter was sealed in its square boxes and sent down to the Government grading-stores at Wellington, to wait for the steamers that carried them to the other end of the world.

And the railway trucks were packed with sweltering sheep ready for the freezer, and day by day they poured into the slaughtering houses a hundred miles away, to emerge frozen stiff as boards, neatly clothed in fine linen for their last long journey to Smithfield Markets.

And the roaring streams and creeks of this mountainous district, that yet hid within its recesses wide open valleys of fatness, were being harnessed too, brought in line with that sweep of advancement that seemed in the air. Already the turbines were humming at the base of the tumbling waterfalls of this rainy land; and here and there a traveller making his muddy way through half-formed bush roads would come at night to a blaze of light where some insignificant township had taken advantage of its

situation near a rocky gorge to turn that riotous torrent into electric light.

And there was ever the clamour for new schools from the distant settlers; and here and there on the roadside brand-new, brown-painted public schools were planted—little two-roomed erections behind the bleak shelter of a post-and-rail fence. And the country school master or mistress—a smooth-faced, awkward city youth, or a bright, lonely town girl—would stand at the door on the mornings and watch the few straggling children slowly coming along the heavy roads. Some were walking, most riding; sometimes two sisters a-straddle on the same quiet old cart-horse, sometimes, in the summer, a smart young settler's son on his bicycle. And the little wooden churches and chapels were being bravely erected side by side, each a visible and comforting sign to Wesleyan or Anglican of the permanence and absolute pre-eminence of his faith.

The district was prospering, waking to a strenuous life. And over all throbbed a sense of personal responsibility for the progress of the district, of personal participation in the growing prosperity. Each person, man and woman, in the district had his vote, and felt a thrill of the common energy that urged the district on. Their Parliamentary member was a pushing democrat—a publican in one of the smaller townships at the other end of the constituency, a notorious "battler" for the district's rights—a "roads and culverts member." The great, sturdy form of the Premier of the colony was known by sight to every school child in the district. He made flying visits to Waiatua to open the new culvert, to perorate at a party meeting, to take the chair at a dinner given to celebrate the opening of a new length of the railway line, to keep in personal touch with the

settlers, to conciliate and pledge. Each person felt himself, herself, the focus of an incessant activity, the central figure of a national drama.

And during the five years that King lived that strenuous life in the township of Waiatua he grew to understand and to share this feeling of personal responsibility. He identified himself with the fortunes of the district. It seemed to him that here was no unworthy ambition—to join in the common responsibility, the local pride. It seemed to him that he received a new dignity in sinking that aggressive personality of his in the wider interests of his district. He felt for the people of the district a broader and more satisfying sympathy. He recognised their sturdy endeavours; like them he was a worker. It seemed to him, too, that, kept as busy as he was, he did not miss the loss of his art. There was no room for art in this sturdy, materialistic progress; life, here, was crude, sane, simple—above all, healthy. It bred strong, strenuous, brave men, with immediate ambitions, intensely local views. And yet there was nothing to repine over, little to regret. He was working hard—and enjoying it. His appetite was splendid, his outlook optimistic. Now he looked back on the life he had led in Sydney as little more than the preliminary training of the runner before the start of the race. He had found his level and he was content. With this life of incessant change, these visits to every part of the district, this sense of intimate concern in the fortunes of every individual of his acquaintance, he felt an uplifting of the heart that sometimes led to a vague desire for closer intercourse with some other soul. His bronzed, clean-shaven face, with its firm-set mouth and its steady eyes, seemed to typify the sturdy peace that filled his being. He walked with the arrogance of

perfect health. He believed almost passionately in the great future of his district. He knew everybody in his town, from the railway porter to the latest settler across the range, and he called many of them by their first name, or the local name that afforded them, in the estimation of the settlers, a sufficient identification. And to many of them he was King.

He wore thick-soled boots now.

XXXI

SHORTLY after his arrival at Waiatua King had written to Aroha. It had been a difficult matter to renew an acquaintance that had so completely dropped out of sight. Yet he managed to write her a mere friendly letter, telling her of his last change, and asking her for news of herself.

She did not reply at once. After a month a letter came, brief and bald. She thanked him for his friendship, assured him that she was well and happy, was glad again to hear from him, and regretted that he had found it necessary to relinquish his thoughts of an artistic career. It had been her jealously held belief that he would win fortune and fame through art, and she was sorry. But he knew best. She admired his strength in putting his hopes and ambitions so courageously aside. For herself, she was hard at work. The run required a ceaseless supervision, but she was prospering. She wished him well.

It was a cold letter, King admitted. He had indeed anticipated a warmer letter—a letter telling him that he was not altogether forgotten, that her thoughts of him sometimes were coloured by old memories. But, with a grim laugh at his incurable egotism, he put the matter out of sight and went about his work. So she shook him off. Well, he had deserved nought else. He had half formulated a

hope that there might be compensations in life, that, after all, he and Aroha. . . .

He tore her letter slowly in pieces and dropped them into a waste-paper basket, beside the tatters of a conveyancing draft. And he did not afterwards collect the scattered fragments.

Sometimes he wrote to Barbara, but her replies were brief. She had little to tell. She was always interested in him, but she could scarcely succeed in interesting him in turn. Her life and personality were so monotonous. Gradually the sparse letters became still rarer. He could see that some day the correspondence would die of inanition. And at the end of the five years of his stay in Waiatua he recognised that it had died. He had not the capacity for a distant attachment. He was man enough, too little of a hero, to need the personal nearness of his friends. So, as he had found before—as the exiles always find—the blank leagues of sea-space that estrange the world were of more virulence than hate.

In none of her letters did she mention the letter she had placed beneath his door his last night in Sydney; and she never knew that he had not received it. It lay concealed beneath its strip of carpet for months; then a housemaid engaged in room-cleaning noticed it and took it to her mistress. She had mislaid King's address, and Miss Barbara Smith, who was the only person who might have known, had left these lodgings shortly after King went away. So the landlady opened it. She recognised the handwriting of Miss Smith.

The landlady read it. "The sly minx!" she said, putting it in the fire with a righteous blush for the shamelessness of her sex. "I always suspected there was something between those two."

She retailed the incident with detail at afternoon

tea, and for half an hour knew that she occupied the proud position of being the centre of interest. So the letter was not altogether wasted.

One spring morning King found a telegram on his office table from his father. His eye caught the signature first, and his heart stopped in an agony of suspense. It must be something serious that would cause his father to communicate with him. It was.

His mother had suddenly become dangerously ill. He had had no hint of a gradual break-up in her strength : that she had piteously striven to hide from her husband and her son. In an agony of fear King took the first train for Wellington. There he found that the steamers did not suit, and he was kept waiting a day, fuming at the delay and telegraphing for news. Two days later he was in Dunedin. He was met at the station by his father with a black band on his arm.

Together they went to the house and into the darkened room.

And as King stood over the poor, worn, white body of his mother, the deep and unutterable love that had lain dormant in him broke from him in a great groan. All the long train and steamer journey he had had time to reproach himself with his neglect of his mother. Again and again, during those five years, he had made up his mind to take a trip to Dunedin to see his mother again, but always the dislike he felt at the thought of meeting his father again had intervened. It gave him little consolation to reflect that he had frequently urged her to come to Waiatua and visit him. She had said that she could not leave his father ; he was getting old now, and liked to have her with him always. She could not leave him, even to see her son. But some day,

she knew, her King would come down and visit his old home. And he had come at last!

And now it seemed to him that he had not known how deep and real had always been his love for her. Intellectually he had far out-grown her. Between their minds there was no bond. And yet, surviving all this inevitable growth and change, unperturbed by all these essential differences, between them lay, hidden and yet palpable, an ineradicable bond. He had put her out of his mental life. In his letters from Sydney he had told her little of his ideals, and when he returned to New Zealand he had not let her see what he had relinquished, fearing to give her that cause for worry. But now he wondered passionately whether he had computed at its right value the love in a mother's heart. Dimly, in some non-mental way, she did understand. In them pulsed one common heart; the generations that severed them had been bridged by mere mother-love. He had been callous, hard. He might have made more allowances, have taken more trouble to let her see his point of view, have relinquished more of his reserve, have shown her more of his weaknesses, have been less of the man of the world, more of the son. He should have been kinder, should have shown her those little love-courtesies that mean so little to a man, that are so easy to a man, and that mean so much to a craving woman's heart. And now it was eternally too late.

It did not console him that all sons were the same —that no son could return at its full value the inexhaustible store of love for her offspring that suffuses a mother's heart. He blamed himself that he had not been able to give back to his mother that terribly passionate, self-sacrificing love of motherhood. It did not console him that perhaps the stream of love,

like the stream of life, flows for ever only one way—down, from generation to generation. Nor did it heal the great grief of his spirit to reflect that the large, self-effacing love of motherhood asks no recompense, craves no reward, is dimly satisfied with itself, pours itself unpremeditated out and is gratefully content for its superb privileges. Nor did he glean any comfort out of the thought that probably his mother had never guessed how alien to her thought he had grown. Life had taken him in hand, and life was a ruthless taskmaster. But perhaps she guessed that, too, and made allowances for life and for him. Dimly he conceived the great splendour of a mother's love.

And now, in his supreme agony of regret, he would have given life for one moment in which he could tell that dead white thing, dressed in his mother's semblance, that he loved her, that she held a place apart and sacred in his heart, and that his love for her was of the deep and unspoken kind that proved its sincerity. And yet one little fondness, one foolish word of boyish love, would have been more worth to her than all the deep reserve of his heart! That lesson he had learnt too late.

He turned to his father—the hard, narrow-minded man of God. And between them a sudden stream of sympathy revived. King saw how worn, how old he looked. He had never imagined that a man could look so broken, and his father had always been so reserved, so strenuous, so aloof, so self-assured! King seemed to understand something of the agony and the irremediable loneliness of that stern man's unrelenting heart. He gropingly put his hand in his, and together, like little children, father and son stood looking down upon the one memory that life held in common for them. The old man pressed his son's

hand. King felt the shrinking from his loneliness that that grasp involuntarily expressed. His father was growing old—and the loneliness of age. . . . Perhaps King could help him to grow reconciled with life—on his part a little patience, a little forbearance, a little tolerance. . . .

The day after the funeral King escaped from the desolate home. Almost with a feeling of guilt he slipped out of the house for a walk by himself. For during these two days his father had come to depend upon him with a pathetic humbleness. It was King who had to lead him away from the grave, and the old man had come with the docility of a little child. And now his father would hardly let him from his sight, for he followed him about as though doubting whether he—this new-found son—might not, too, be taken from him by treacherous death.

But King felt the urgent need to be alone. He had seen too closely the terrible brutality of life. He had brooded too long over the grim callousness and the bitter mockery of this existence. Life had given so little to his mother. He wondered if she had ever been very happy, if she had once reached the heights of happiness of which her nature was capable, for which her nature was meant. . . .

No, he must escape from that house yet haunted by the memories of malignant death. He was young yet; his heart was stifled in those bleak rooms; he must get out to the air. So he slipped, almost sneaked, away.

The sun was brilliant in a blue, white-flecked sky. The bush, that was never bare of foliage, with the coming of the spring had taken on a newer, fresher shade of green. Here and there English trees—willows and poplars and hawthorns—had put out little eager, grasping hands of green.

He turned instinctively to the Belt—that broad ribbon of bush that rimmed the nestling city in its arena between the mountains and the harbour. He walked swiftly, feeling the blood leap in his veins. The splendour of the world, the pageantry of Nature, called to his slumbering youth. His soul answered with a thrill of joy. A great, indefinite, glowing rose of hope blossomed within him. Life was a superb thing!

He took little heed of his direction, and at length, after climbing a steep track between the solemn ranks of heavy bush, he paused to gain breath. He looked round. At once a memory came to him. He knew where he was—on the track that once he had taken with Aroha!

Why, there, not twenty yards off, was the very spot where, boy and girl, they had separated—for ever—in such mutual bewilderment and pain! How vividly the scene brought the memory of Aroha back to him!

Instinctively his eyes sought for the actual presence of Aroha. And he experienced a real shock of disappointment when he realised that she was not there. But at the corner, curiously enough, there was a woman, leaning on the slip-rails of the fence with her back to him. And suddenly the vague hope crept to being again. It might be!—

He walked quickly toward the figure. The woman did not stir, did not turn. No; it was not Aroha. It was some older woman. He noted in the pose a hinted weariness, a maturity, a sedateness that were not in his memories of Aroha. Yet there was a vague resemblance in her figure to some woman he had known. His mind went swiftly back to the women of his memory. Gertrude—Barbara—Effie? No; it was none of these.

By this time he was very close to her. She had half turned at the sound of his steps, as if idly to see whom it was, but had abandoned the impulse. All he could see was a mass of brown hair, a glimpse of a thin cheek. No; it was not Aroha.

He passed on reluctantly. Life seemed suddenly to have gone grey. He paced on with lingering steps.

Then an impulse made him turn his head. The woman was looking at him. It might be—it was!

He hesitated and returned. The woman stared, faintly interested. He came up to her.

"Aroha!" he said tremulously, and held out his hand.

The woman looked at him in a scornful surprise. "I—beg your— That is my name—but I don't know who—"

"You don't remember me?" King said with a sudden sense of humiliation. It was Aroha—and she had forgotten him utterly!

"No, I seem to remember—"

"I'm King."

The woman flushed rosy.

"You, King! I did not recognise. I never thought to see you here. I did not think that I would ever see you again."

She put her hand in his. They looked keenly and long in each other's faces.

She had changed, King saw with a sudden pang. She had grown older. There were lines about her eyes. Time and trouble had blurred the exquisite youth of her face; the mouth drooped a little. And in the thick, brown hair he saw insidious lines of grey. Her figure was no longer the figure of a girl. Ten years had wrought their will upon her youth. He recalled her lithe ærial suppleness as she stood

alone in that wide waste of tussock land, poised delicately on the ridge, balancing herself against the audacious wind.

He noticed then a quiet taste in her dress that seemed to harmonise with her gentle sedateness. And yet she was not anything but beautiful. Her upright presence, her grace of movement, her superb eyes and her well-moulded features, gave an impression of beauty that no years could reach. He saw in her face the suave calm, the quiet strength of the tussock land. Only, she was no longer young.

A great restraint fell upon them. They had drifted so far apart; their memories of each other were so faint, so ethereal, so irreducible to the level of mere earth. It was so difficult to tether so fair a dream with words. Each to the other seemed a thing of impalpable fancy, a vague vision from the wonderland of dream. And real and living, man, woman, they stood confused and uncertain before each other.

He was eager to know what had brought her to this spot. She explained that she had come to the city on business about Westella. The run had been unusually prosperous of late; but the strain of managing it and a leasehold of an adjoining seven thousand acres that she had acquired six years ago had become too heavy for her unaided strength. So she was thinking of getting a manager for it. Her health had broken down under the ceaseless work and worry; she had taken upon herself too heavy a task for a woman. There had been money worries, losses of stock in the last big snow-storm, a disastrous legal dispute with the Government rabbit-inspector . . . . She felt the need of someone who could relieve her of some of her responsibility. If she could get a

good manager she would go away for a bit, perhaps come to Dunedin to live; she wanted to take some classes at the university—she had missed so much in life, shut away up there in the back-blocks. And perhaps she would go for a trip to Australia. John, who was back at his work again at the run, though not as ploughman, but as manager of the new leasehold, had told her the glories of Sydney. Or perhaps she might go to England. She was not quite so strong as she once was, and she had never spared herself. The life was a hard one—perhaps too hard for a woman. And she was so utterly cut off from everyone. She felt herself no longer so independent; she was becoming accustomed to lean a little on the world. She was tired of work. And she had shut the door for ever on the past—and the future was so lonely. She had heard of his great bereavement. She was very sorry for him. It must have been a great shock. She hoped he had arrived in time to see her before she died. Ah! then, that must have been very bitter! Her voice showed her sympathy, her eyes—

He noticed with a sudden gladness that her eyes were the eyes of his memories of her. They were Aroha's eyes. Strange how well he remembered that upward ripple of the brows above them! There were no eyes in all the world like them, so frank, so sympathetic, so sincere.

"This is my last day in Dunedin," she went on. "I've got a manager to take the billet for a year, and I'm going back with him and his wife to-morrow to explain my methods of working to him. He signed the agreement this morning, and as I had an afternoon off to myself, and love the bush—you know we've hardly got any bush on the run, but in the leasehold there are some glorious gullies of bush—I

came out here for a stroll. It is such a glorious day."

"That tempted me, too," he said. "It is strange that a mere spring day—mere sunlight, that is the ultimate cause of life upon earth, should have brought us together again!"

He laughed with an irresponsible gladness. She smiled a little, hardly knowing why. Youth and spring and sunlight—they were unconquerable.

Aroha had been struck by the change in him; but his laugh recalled—she strove hard to remember what it recalled. Some vague, yet, she was sure, beautiful thing.

Then she found herself comparing him with Will—the one man she had loved, the man whose love had been to her a reality before which the dream-meeting with King upon the hills had vanished as the frail delicacy of a morning mist melts into the superb radiance of the day. This stranger who now stood before her had not the strength of personality, the splendid arrogance of purpose that in Will had taken her heart captive. Will dared all things, superbly indifferent to the world. He over-rode her woman's hesitancy with a conquering recklessness. She loved him. But he had given her up, had gone away silently, as if ashamed. She had never been able to think of Will as ashamed, and yet he had gone away, left her. She looked again at King. How he had changed!

"And your painting?" she asked.

He laughed easily. "Ah! that was a dream. The reality was not for me. Yet it was something to have had the dream. I have given all that up now; I do not seem to have the time. There is so much to do."

Her eyes saddened. An impulse of sympathy made her lift her hand to his shoulder.

But he laughed again. "Ah! that's all done with. I have had my try. It was not in me to succeed. There were other things for me to do."

"But don't—don't you ever—try now?"

His face brightened in the way she remembered so well.

"Ah! there are pictures that I feel it in me to paint. Some day . . . perhaps—"

Then he broke off with a laugh at himself. "I'm incurable, I believe. I can't crush down that hope; and yet I know it is only a hope. I shall never paint now."

"I'm sorry," she said. To her this candid admission of inability seemed like a death. She was surprised to find that he looked so well, seemed so contented, so healthy. There was even a suspicion that he might be getting—well, stout. The lean, pallid youth she recalled had for ever gone. He had grown older. Yet the present man was good to look upon. The brown face, the steady eyes, the firm mouth, the strong chin, the robust strength of body, the expression of ability, of self-confidence, marked him out a man. She knew she could trust him. Ah! if only she could give it all up, lean on him. . . .

But she knew that that was forever impossible. He did not know.

And suddenly it came to her that his was a stronger personality than hers. He was a man, sure of himself, acquitting himself in this struggle of life with a serene certitude within him of his worth. He had outgrown his weaknesses.

And gradually, as they spoke together, King saw the Aroha of his remembrance struggle confusedly out of the personality before him. Little flashes of her old self revealed themselves. He recognised that Time is powerless to shift the basis of the most in-

significant soul. The foundations that mean individuality are immovably laid before birth, and all Time can do is to mould and coalesce. The years make their pertinacious assaults, and the ego serenely repulses the idea of change. One makes resolutions, good and bad, and sins the same sins and repents the same repentance from youth to age. All that the years can do is to hammer at the loosely-hung desires and repulsions within the soul and make of those diverse and warring characteristics one soul. Life is the anvil upon which a soul is hammered into shape. Sometimes the blows are badly aimed and the soul is spoiled. That is Life's fault.

The dusk had now come about the man and the woman upon the lonely heights of that hill-path. The night was already at rest within the sombre foliage of the line of sentinel gums that watched the sea. The sunset had quickly faded; the world had gone grey. A stealthy dreariness crept upon the hour. An infinite longing for companionship in the wide loneliness of life held them both within a common grasp.

An impulse brought him to her. They were alone in life, forgotten by the world. They had been singled out from the first for each other, and Fate had not quite forgotten. Only now were they beginning to glimpse its far-seeing secret. By bringing these two together at this remembered spot Life had relinquished into their hands its jealously-guarded gift of the future. The supreme responsibility of their existence had come upon them. Would they be worthy of that great trust?

It came to King that he must speak. But did he love her? He did not know. He remembered the great thrill of happiness that had left him almost breathless when his eyes first saw Aroha. He re-

called the mature passion of his love for Gertrude, the brief frenzy of his love for Effie. This love was not so splendid as those. No; he could not tell himself that he loved Aroha as he had once loved. And yet were not those fierce loves doomed to as fierce an ending? This might endure. Nay, it must endure. He was not blinded now. He was no foolish boy.

He had learnt much from life; but the greatest truth he had learnt was humility. Who was he, what surpassing gift had he, that he should deserve much of life? What was there in him that could lift him above the penalties of his fellows? No; he had seen the glories of a great love, but those splendours were not for him. He did not deserve much from life. He would be gratefully content with what life spared him. And if that was Aroha's love, it was a gift surpassing what he had deserved—a miracle-gift undreamed of! But something told him that it was not for him; and he acquiesced in that judgment of life. He did not deserve that great gift. And yet if, after all, Life had this in her firm-clenched hand? If he might win this woman for his wife!

He dared: with a great humility he dared. He took her hand.

"No, no, no, no!" she whispered, divining the words that were upon his lips. "Don't let us spoil it all. King, are you incurable? Must sentiment always intervene? Let us be friends. Don't say anything that would not let us always be friends. Ah! King, my dear friend, I want your friendship so much! I am almost alone in life. You know I have no people now. I am at the beginning of another race. So few friends, and I had thought of you as the chief of them. Let us make a truce to love. We do not want it now. We have passed all that. I feel that I have come out on to the other

side—into a region of happy calm. Believe me, King—I do not want to pain you—but I have done with love."

The drear truth in her voice appalled him. His fingers let her quiet hand drop. Yes, surely it was time for both to be done with love. Love was only a dawn that flaunted fleeting rainbow colours on a world that too soon would grow pitiless and white. The day was clear, but the dawn was too splendid a beacon to burn long. Let them be content with the comfortable clearness of the prosaic day.

"Yes," she continued, after a silence, "I finished with love when Will went away. I could not love you as I loved him, King. No; not if I lived for an eternity. For when he went he took, it seems to me, nearly all my soul with him. All he left me of myself was memory—and that was the most terrible thing of all! Ah! if he had but dragged my heart from me and left me dead! But he took from me all I had—love and self-respect and pride and hope and dreams—and when I gave him all, when I did not cry out nor move, he laughed and handed me back—memory! A woman who loved as I loved cannot forget, cannot efface her love from her heart, for it fills her heart, and as long as she lives her heart is only memory. I know now—I have learned, King—that Will was not worth very much, that he was not worth loving, perhaps; and yet my love for him was the greatest thing in this life. I would think it a desecration to allow anybody else to speak words of love to me. For I loved him—and though . . . King, in spite of all, in spite of myself even, I know that every part of my being is in love with him still!"

So King felt himself thrust into the outer darkness. Upon his breast he felt the shadowy hand of a memory in which he held no part. Yet he rebelled.

"But, Aroha, have you altogether forgotten?" he said. "The days at Westella, the days in the open, the rides together! And the last time we met here, beneath this very gum-tree!"

"No, no! I remember, King. It was the only dream I ever dreamed. But it was not life. After you went away I lived. You never dreamed how deeply I could live. And life has obliterated so much of the dream. Ah, no! If I ever cared for you it would be only as a friend. If I married you I would not cease to remember that part of my life in which you had no share. Oh! King, King, why did you go away? Why did you go away?"

The man was not so easily beaten. The sturdy fibre of his new being fought defeat.

"Aroha, I want you to be my wife. I cannot bring you much that is of worth. Life seems to have stripped me bare of all its mystery. I am a common man, managing to pull through life without any ideals but the common ideal of earning an honest living. But I feel that we two must not part here. I made one terrible mistake upon this very spot. I am not going to make another. I know myself now. I need not fear that I am deceiving myself. Perhaps my going away, my meeting with other women, was solely in order that I might be sure. I am not offering you mere passion, as I see my first love for you was. My love now is a saner, surer thing. For I did not know how much I loved you till now. Yet all these years it has been growing, growing unconsciously in my soul. And now I am sure—terribly sure! I have been in love, Aroha, once, twice; but that passionate love makes me frightened now to think of. I would not offer you that, but a sane and sturdy friendship, a steady and sober love. I think I have learnt to be tolerant, to make allowances, to

forgive. I come to you not demanding your love. I come humbly, glad if you could grant me this great gift, thankful indeed and victorious if this thing is for me. It seems to me now, Aroha, that I have been preparing myself to be in some way worthy of your love. Life has had me in hand. Let us come together now. We are both left lonely here. I, the end of an old race, you, the promise of a new. Let us face the future together in a union that will shield us both from hurt. Dearest, I can protect you, shield you; I can put my arms round you and keep the years at bay. And, perhaps—though I would not if you did not wish it—I could help you to forget. Will you come into my arms, my dear one? Will you give me at last yourself, your love?"

And as King spoke it seemed to the woman that impalpable arms were slowly drawing her toward his breast. A great weariness had come upon her. She was so tired of her steadfastness, so sick of her aloof courage. He was so strong. How terribly she stood alone! It would be so good to give it all up, to trust everything to the sincerity of that strong man!

But she restrained herself sharply. It was right that he should know. Here, at last, was the haven opening to her, here the long-sought rest. And now she must tell him! That was her punishment—her terrible punishment. It was his right to know. She revered his friendship too much, she was too humbly grateful for his love.

"Stop!" she said, lowering her eyes and speaking low. "I must tell you something—something that will put an end to all this talk. I am not bitter, King, really—save at life. And it is my own fault. I was in love with Will. I loved him utterly. And I trusted him. I trusted him as no woman should ever

trust a man—as since time began women have trusted men! And he—he—I do not blame him more than I blame myself—he—he took advantage of my great trust—I was only a girl—and he left me! That is all. And, ah! God, I love him still!"

He stood horror-struck. And with a great despair in her eyes she turned to go.

He let her go.

XXXII

AROHA GREY walked slowly toward the ridge of hills that separated her valley from the next in this interminable welter of hills.

Above her, dazzlingly white clouds flecked a deep-blue sky. The wind was bitter and keen.

And as she slowly trudged toward the tussock-clad saddle she did not look up. Her memories held her busy. She had come back from Dunedin the day before; and this afternoon, giving way to the stirring of an old, long-dormant impulse, she had come up to look once more idly down the wide valley that allowed her that futile glimpse into the world beyond.

She recalled the last day she had seen Will, the utter surrender of herself she, in the perilous greatness of a woman's love, had made to him. And it did not seem to her now that she could ever bring herself to hate him for his betrayal of her trust. She felt too proud of the strength of her womanhood. She in her ignorance had been to blame. She should not have trusted him so utterly. And after the first great shock of grief she had grown more tolerant. It was true that Will had forsaken her; but perhaps he, too, had his problems to solve. It might have been a greater renunciation for him to leave her than to have come back. She did not know. Only she was sure that he would never love the woman he had afterwards married—a Melbourne girl with an income—

as he had loved her. That was her crown of consolation—that her woman's pride.

And now for the first time the image of Will was not paramount in her mind. Another personality had obscured it—as once it had obscured that personality. Her mind now vividly envisaged King. He was an older man now—not old in years, but not young in life. His eyes had lost their old fire; but his glance had in it now a serene directness, an unquestioning assurance that she greatly liked. He had surrendered to life, given up all his ambitions, emerged from the veil of dreams to her sight—a mere mortal. He had stepped down from his mountain-top—and she found him at her side! And yet—she recognised the contradiction—King was not a failure. He had compromised with life; and even the greatest, the strongest, have to compromise. He had recognised his nature and stooped to the blow that life had dealt him. But had risen up the stronger, unshaken and ready again for the fight. He had been hardened by the blows of the *mêlée*. And though he no longer yearned for a star, he knew its worth. He had set out on the splendid quest of art—and he came back bearing a book of law. Yet he had not altogether failed; he was waging a worthy fight. He had stamina, a quiet, malleable strength. Those last five years of life in Waiatua—of which she had heard from other sources—formed no unworthy record. He was doing his duty. Perhaps there was a career for him—a solid and permanent success—in law . . . perhaps in Parliament. . . .

And she had a moment's vision of King, the man of the people, the man who had fought life and been conquered, the man who understood and had learnt the wide need for tolerance. She saw him relinquish his personality, wholly absorbed in the stirring life of

the self-conscious community. She saw him identify himself with his district. She saw him but the splendid spokesman of an inarticulate nationhood. She saw him triumphantly elected for the House, rising to be the leader of a new party, swayed by no mere party fanaticism, moving in a sane and temperate way to the attainment of some indispensable and moderate goal, aiming at no star, yet with eyes upon a star. She could trust him—the people of the colony could trust him—with his future and theirs. It was no unworthy ambition. It would be no unworthy task to help him toward such an attainment.

And how her lonely heart leaned out toward him! How he drew her, almost unwillingly, by that mere strength of his! How swiftly and unerringly their paths had led to this common goal! How utterly the circle had come complete!

And with a pang Aroha remembered. She had put him for ever beyond her reach. She had vindicated her sincerity by a sacrifice that was almost beyond any woman's strength, almost beyond hers. But she had been true to her ideal of him. She knew that he would respect her for that tremendous truth. And yet, was it his respect she so wanted? Some strange force had been at work within her heart since she had left him on that bush-path; and now her heart, that had once been so strong, so self-assured a thing, seemed transmuted into a mere helpless longing for his love. She remembered that once she had dared to judge him, to hold his love in the balance. And now all her heart was one great yearning for the strength of his love. The change had been so incomprehensible, so sudden. And so irremediable!

Yes, she was glad that she had told him. There must be no deception between them ever more.

Only it left her so lonely—and lonely women lived so long!

She looked up. She was nearly at the summit of the tussock-ridge. She paused, as she had always paused, at that point. Beyond her, so her swift fancy ran, lay the wonders of the unknown!

Ah, no!

That was her childish dream. Beyond lay the known, the sordid, the inevitable. Life was the same everywhere. The same troubles, the same obstacles, the same defeats, the same despairs, the same separations, the same loneliness. Life was the same for all—here in the sheltered solitude of the tussock land, over that summit of the ridge in the great world beyond, the same imperturbable current of life flowed and flowed.

No; there was nothing beyond.

And yet it was over the brow of that ridge that once she had cheated herself with the gallant hope that some day her fairy prince was triumphantly to come! She laughed tolerantly at the thought.

She hastened her steps. As she rose toward the summit the wind struck her freshly on the face, flinging back a tress of her loosely-bound, luxurious brown hair. Her strong, firm, lithe limbs repulsed the persistent attack of the steady breeze. Her grey dress streamed back, outlining her splendid bosom, her tall and graceful body. Undeterred by the gusts she trudged sturdily toward the top of the ridge. The spirit of serene conflict spurred her pulse, swept the rich blood to her cheek, lit her eyes with the fire of youth. The instinctive gladness of health and maturity glowed within her. Life had used her sore, had broken and buffeted her, even as this keen wind rained its persistent blows upon her; and yet she was unconquered. The tussock land had sheltered

and nursed her. Her heart was young yet; it craved, demanded its meed of happiness; hope flowed in every vein, spoke in every tingling nerve. In every inch of her body she felt the superb conviction of her blossoming womanhood.

She reached the top of the ridge and, leaning against the wind, gazed into the valley beyond.

Across the tussocks, so near that they were almost face to face, came the fairy prince.

She paused, breathless with a tremendous surmise.

King spoke.

"I could not let you go like that. It was horrible of me to let you go. But I could not move. I could not think. But now I have come to tell you—"

"Ah, no!" she said, reaching her hands to his, "don't tell me anything. I know."

And she gave herself to his arms, and he kissed her.

Then hand in hand, like little children clinging tremulously together before the terrible enigmas of life, hand in hand they turned and went slowly down the darkening valley.

THE END

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